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THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF THE MOTHER OF GOD

An Exposition by ARCHBISHOP ULLATHORNE *Revised by* CANON ILES, D.D., *and with an* INTRODUCTION *by the* BISHOP OF BIRMINGHAM

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CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
	Introduction by Bishop Ilsley	ix
I	The Office and Dignity of the Mother of God ...	1
II	How the Fathers speak of the Dignity of the Mother of God	13
III	The Law of Preparation	25
IV	The Principle of Exception from Law	34
V	The Law of Gradation in Perfection; and the Law of the Accumulation of Excellence ...	42
VI	In what sense are we to understand the Mystery of the Immaculate Conception?	54
VII	The Eternal Counsel of God	59
VIII	The Fall of the Angels	64
IX	Original Sin and its Effects	81
X	The Fall of Man	91
XI	Joachim and Anna	101
XII	The Moment of the Immaculate Conception ...	107
XIII	The Voice of the Fathers	112
XIV	Mahomet and Martin Luther on the Immaculate Conception	128
XV	The Voice of the Divines	135
XVI	The Voice of the Liturgy and the Voice of the Faithful	158
XVII	The Voice of the Episcopate	173
XVIII	The Voice of the Holy See	181
XIX	Conclusion	192
	Index of subjects	217
	Index of Scripture references	222

INTRODUCTION

In the published "Letters of Archbishop Ullathorne" it is recorded (pp. 57 seqq.) that his admirable book on the Immaculate Conception was written in the year 1854, in the intervals of leisure which the author was able to find during the course of the canonical visitation of his diocese. It was first published in the early part of 1855. So great was the demand for it that it was reprinted several times from stereotyped plates. The author however contemplated a thorough revision of the book with emendations and considerable additions. He commenced the task, but did not complete it.

The Jubilee of the definition of the Immaculate Conception has created a demand for a fresh issue of this valuable work; and it has seemed good to complete, as far as possible, the revision which the author took in hand but left unfinished. I have entrusted this work to the Very Rev. Canon Iles; and he has expended upon it a considerable amount of time and patient labour. Although he has not succeeded to his entire satisfaction in verifying all the quotations, yet what he has accomplished will considerably enhance the value of the book.

In its revised form I hope that the intention and desire of its eminent author may be fulfilled in further promoting the devotion of our people to the Immaculate Mother of God.

✠ Edward Ilsley,
Bishop of Birmingham.

Oscott, August 5, 1904.

The Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God

CHAPTER I

The Office and Dignity of the Mother of God

THE multitude that saw Jesus nailed to His Cross could have no doubts respecting His human nature. They saw His Mother standing by in sore distress, and had no doubts but that Jesus was her Son. Of what then were men ignorant? Alas! of everything. For they knew not that Jesus was God, and that Mary was the Mother of God. What the apostles then had to prove, before they could make a Christian, was that Jesus, whom Pontius Pilate crucified, was both the Son of Mary and the Son of God. And thus, when they began to preach, they had to tell how Mary was always a virgin, and how, in her state of virginity, an angel came and greeted her from heaven. They had to tell at full length the whole history about her, which is recorded but briefly in the Sacred Scriptures. They told how, in her retirement, the Archangel Gabriel came to her, and said: "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou amongst women," and how Mary was troubled, and thought within herself about the meaning of this salutation; and how the angel said: "Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God: behold thou shalt

conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of David, His Father; and He shall reign in the house of Jacob for ever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end." But Mary, pure as the angel, and solicitous for that virginity which she had vowed and given unto God, asks of the heavenly messenger: "How shall this be done, for I know not man?" And Gabriel answered her: "The holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee. And, therefore, also the Holy, which shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God." And Mary bowed herself down most meekly to the will of God, and said: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word." *

Such was the wonderful beginning of the Gospel of truth. And as Mary introduced Jesus into the world, so the preaching of Mary introduced the preaching of Jesus.

Then the apostles went on to tell the wonders of His nativity. How, whilst Mary was in the stable, the angels came out from heaven, and sang of the birth of the Saviour of the world; they sang "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will." † And wherever the apostles came to plant the Church, they had to begin this history again. And thus Jesus and Mary came together into the hearts of the faithful. Thus the love of Jesus and Mary grew together in the Church. Indeed, it was impossible to separate them, with-

* Luke i, 28-38. † Luke ii, 14.

out destroying faith in Jesus Himself. For if you separate Mary from Jesus, you deny that He is man, and so you deny that He is the Man-God. And if you deny that Mary is the Mother of God, you separate Jesus from Himself; you separate His divinity from His humanity, and thus you deny that He is the God-man.

But whilst the apostles were preaching Jesus and Mary, Mary herself abode with John, that virgin disciple of divine love to whom Jesus had confided her as a mother to a son. With him she dwelt in the body; but with her soul she was ever ascending unto Heaven, where her Son and God abode. No mother besides her had ever loved her child and her God in one person. And in the order of nature, as well as in the order of grace, this world was a blank to her without Him. In this state of trial, she perfected her graces to the last degree of divine desire, breathed out her earthly life in one last act of divinest union with her beloved one, and was assumed by Him into the everlasting vision of His glory.

Scarcely had the other apostles gone to their reward, and St John was still remaining on earth, when there grew into power a sect that aimed a deadly stroke at the union of Jesus with Mary. The Ebionites denied that Mary had conceived Jesus of the Holy Ghost in the glory of her virginity, and made Him but the son of Joseph.* Therefore it was that St John was induced to write his Gospel, that he might prove more fully than the other Evangelists that it was the eternal Word Himself who was made flesh of Mary. And the traditions of St John were still further

* Cf. Epiph., Hæres., xxxi, 2.

recorded by his disciples. Thus St Irenæus, the disciple of one of those apostolic men whom St John himself had trained, shows, in what he has written against the same impious sect, that Jesus was descended from Adam through Mary, and that, as through the disobedience of that one man, sin had come, and death had prevailed over all men, so through the obedience of One, justice was introduced, and brought the fruits of life to all men. "And," continues St Irenæus, "as the first-formed Adam had his substance from the uncultivated earth, whilst it was yet virgin; for it had not rained on the earth as yet, and mankind had not tilled it;* and as he was formed by the hand of God, that is by the Word, for all things were made by Him;† . . . . so the same Word was born of Mary, still a virgin, and re-established Adam in Himself. If indeed the first Adam had had a man for his father, and had been born of the generation of man, then these heretics might say that the second Adam was the son of Joseph. But if the first man was taken from the earth and formed by the Word of God, it was necessary for that very Word, when He re-established Adam in Himself, to have His generation in the likeness of that of Adam. Why, then, instead of taking earth again, did God form His body from Mary? It was that the new formation might not be different from that which was to be saved, but the very same re-established, with a due keeping of its likeness." ‡

Thus, this disciple of St John's disciple shews that the Son of God who made Adam, would not be born into this world in a worse condition than Adam. That as Adam was made of virgin earth,

* Gen. ii, 5. † John i, 3.
‡ S. Iren. adv. Hæres. III, xxi, 10.

so Christ would be made of a virgin. And that, if He was born of the Virgin Mary, instead of being made of new earth, as Adam was, He did so that He might redeem the race of Adam in the flesh of Adam. Thus Mary, and Mary in her virginity, as the Mother of Jesus, was shewn to be an essential element in the mystery of redemption.

But soon there rose up another heresy, and widely it spread itself, and, like the former, it sought to separate Jesus from Mary, and so to destroy Jesus, but in another way. The Gnostics taught that Jesus took no real flesh from Mary, but that He had only received an appearance of flesh. And St Ignatius, the disciple of St Peter, tells us that "they abstain from the Eucharist, and the public offices of the Church, because they confess not the Eucharist to be the flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ." * Thus, they denied that the body of our Lord was in the Eucharist, because they did not believe that He had ever taken a body from Mary. And thus, they could not separate Jesus from Mary without destroying the most holy Sacrament as well as the whole mystery of redemption. Hence, St Ignatius in his epistles, which in the early Church were read along with the Scriptures, has continually to defend Mary as the true Mother of our Lord and Saviour.† He puts Mary forward as the defence of the mystery of Jesus. And he says, that the virginity and maternity of Mary was one of the mysteries which was the most spoken of throughout the world.‡ And St Irenæus, in repelling the same impiety, goes yet more deeply into the subject of the blessed Virgin, and shews how, as

* S. Ignat. Ep. ad Smyrn. vii.
† Ad Eph. vii, viii, xix; ad Smyrn. i. ‡ Ad Eph. xix.

Jesus was the counterpart of Adam, so Mary was the counterpart of Eve. And that, as the mother of the true Adam, she had become truly the mother of all the living.* Thus did the disciples of the apostles hold up the sound doctrine respecting Mary, as a shield against each successive heresy that assailed either the mystery of Jesus, or the mystery of human redemption through Jesus. Can we fail then to see how the love of Mary grew and deepened throughout the Church along with the love of Jesus ?

It is impossible to think rightly concerning Mary without thinking rightly of all divine mysteries. Thus, if we confess that Mary had God for her Son, we overthrow the impious sect of the Arians. And if we confess that the divinity descended upon her and overshadowed her, we overthrow the heresy of the Macedonians. But after them rose up Nestorius; and he denied that when Jesus was conceived of Mary, the nature of man was united in one person with the nature of God. And it was found that this blasphemy against Jesus could only be effectually repelled by solemnly proclaiming the blessed Virgin Mary to be the Mother of God. It was in that city of Ephesus, where she had dwelt with John, in that favoured city still breathing its remembrances of Mary, that the great council assembled which, by its proclaiming her dignity as the Mother of God, gave the death-stroke at once both to the Nestorians and the Arians. And when the faithful people of Mary's own city had heard but the first sounds which informed them of that decree, they broke out into a joy so rapturous and unbounded, and

* Adv. Hæreses xxii, 4.

gave expressions to it in so many public acts of gratitude, as but few scenes in history can equal. It was in the preordained order of providence that first the mysteries of God should be established in the Creed, and then the prerogatives of Mary. Thus the first great council established the divinity of Jesus; the second affirmed the divinity of the Holy Ghost; the third proclaimed Mary to be the Mother of God. And in the fifth, sixth, seventh and all succeeding councils henceforward, her privileges are ever more and more exalted together with the glories of her blessed Son.

But now a sect began to appear in Arabia, which took an opposite direction, whilst it separated Mary from Jesus. The Collyridians taught that Mary herself was born of a virgin, and so they took from her her own most singular privilege; they made her a divinity, and offered her sacrifice, and thus sought to give to her the rights which belonged to her divine Son.* St Epiphanius replied to the new heresy, and whilst he showed that she was to be honoured, though not adored like her Son, he exalted her true dignity in the most elevated language. "God," he says, "prepared for His only-begotten Son, the heavenly bridegroom, a virgin, whom the Father loved, whom the Son inhabited, whom the Holy Ghost ardently desired." †

It is this divine maternity of Mary which explains both her perfect excellence and her perfect holiness. It is the key to all her gifts and privileges. For the excellence of each creature

* Cf. Epiph. adv. Hæres, xxxix or lxxix, 1.
† S. Epiph. de Laudibus B. V. Mariæ.

is to be found in the degree in which it resembles its Creator. And as the Son of God was the "figure of the Father's substance," * as He was God, and as that Godhead filled His soul, and *dwelt in Him bodily*,† so that as far as the most perfect of human natures could go, His own bore the image and expression of His divinity, so Mary was made as like to Him, as, being a mere creature, she could be made. For, having no earthly father, our Lord bore the human likeness of His mother in all His features. Or rather, she bore His likeness. And as, for thirty years of His life, her mind was the law which directed His obedience, and her will the guide which regulated His actions, her soul was the perfect reflection of His conduct. And as all created holiness is derived from Jesus, and from the degree of our union with Jesus, of which union His sacred and life-giving flesh is the great instrument; we may understand something of the perfect holiness of the Mother of God, from the perfection of her union with her Son. For He was formed by the Holy Ghost of her flesh. And His blood, that saving blood which redeemed the world, was taken from her heart. And whilst the Godhead dwelt bodily in Him, He, for nine months, dwelt bodily in her. And all that time He breathed of her breath and lived of her life. All that time the stream which nourished the growth of life in Jesus flowed from the heart of Mary, and at each pulsation flowed back again and re-entered His Mother's heart, enriching her with His divinest spirit. How pregnant is that blood of His with sanctifying grace, one drop of which might have redeemed the world! And

* Heb. i, 3. † Col. ii, 9.

from the moment of His conception He had already made His oblation, for as St Paul says: "Coming into the world He said: . . . . A body Thou hast fitted to Me. Holocausts for sin did not please Thee. . . . Behold I come. In the head of the book it is written of Me: that I should do Thy will, O God."* And Mary was that most pure temple in which the great High Priest made His offering. There He first offered up that blood, there He first offered up that flesh, of which He said at a later time: "He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood, hath everlasting life. . . . As the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father, so he that eateth Me the same shall live by Me." † But now, it is in a far more intimate and constant way that Jesus lives by Mary and Mary lives by Jesus. Oh, who can tell that mystery of life? Who can comprehend that union between the two hearts of Jesus and of Mary? Every one can understand how much He has been enriched through the heart of His Mother. But who can understand how Jesus enriched the heart of Mary in that incomparable union? For, next to that union by which Jesus is God and man in one person, there is no union so intimate as that of a mother with her child. The saints are His brethren by adoption, but Mary is His Mother by nature. They have affinity with Him, but she holds with Him the first degree of consanguinity. Her graces, then, are of quite another order than those which sanctified the very holiest of the saints. And as St Thomas says, through the operations of her maternity, she touches more nearly on the confines of divinity.‡ And which of the seraphs could ever say to the

* Heb. x, 5, 6, 7. † John vi, 55, 58.
‡ III, d. xxii, q. 3, a. 3; q. 3 ad 3 am.

Lord omnipotent: "Thou art my son, this day have I conceived Thee"?*

Jesus is born, and His features are a copy of her features, as He lies in the arms of His Mother. They converse together through each other's eyes, and the soul of Mary is the mirror of the soul of Jesus. And He puts His divine head upon her bosom, and drinks of her fountains "filled from heaven." †

Then came the time when she must exercise her maternal office, not only with her heart but through her mind. And if God endowed the mind of Moses for his office as the guide of His people, if He put wisdom into Solomon for the sake of Israel, with what exquisite wisdom did He not endow the Mother of God for her far greater office towards Jesus? For Mary guided the ways of Jesus. She was the minister of the Father's will to His incarnate Son. Three days only excepted, the Scripture records the first thirty years of His life in the brief word, that He was subject to His parents.‡ And during that long time the word of Mary was the law of Jesus. During all that time she not only studied the life of Jesus, but she commanded His will and guided His actions; and those actions were each of them contributing to the glory of God and the salvation of the world.

Now may we understand those words of Jesus, when He answered the woman who exclaimed to Him from the crowd, "Blessed is the womb that bore Thee, and the breasts that nourished Thee, and the paps that gave Thee suck." And He said: "Yea, more blessed are they who hear the Word of God and keep it." §

* Ps. ii, 7. † Hymn of the Church. ‡ Luke ii, 51.
§ Luke xi, 27, 28.

She was blessed that she had borne Him; but she was far more blessed that she had received and obeyed that Word by which she had deserved to bear Him. And hence Elizabeth gave her that greeting, "Blessed art thou that hast believed."* She heard that word at all times in her heart. She spoke it to Jesus; she heard it from the lips of Jesus. The dignity of her maternal office had brought even greater blessings to her soul than to her virginal frame, and, as St Augustine says, "she conceived Jesus more happily in her mind than in her womb." †

There is another source of Mary's prerogatives. Jesus came not to violate but to confirm the law of the commandments. And He confirmed them more especially by His obedience to their precepts. But of these commandments the first given with a promise, as St Paul reminds us, is that one which says: "Honour thy father and thy mother."‡ The claims of a mother to the honour and the gifts of her son are pre-eminent before those of all other claimants. How often does God compare His own claims upon us to the claims of parents on their children, as where He says: "If I am a Father, where is My honour?"§ Hence on this subject St Methodius addresses Mary thus: "Thou hast Him for thy debtor, who lends to all. For we all owe debts to God; but to thee even He is indebted, who has said: 'Honour thy father and thy mother.' And that He might fulfil His own law, and exceed all men in its observance, He paid all honour and all grace to His own Mother."‖

* Luke i, 45. † De Sancta Virginitate 3.
‡ Eph. v, 1; Exod. xx, 12. § Mal. i, 6.
‖ S. Method. De Simeone et Anna, quo die Dño in templo occurrerunt, x.

Hence Eusebius* says: "If you would know how great is the Mother, think how great is the Son." Hence, again, St Augustine: "No heart can conceive, no tongue can express, the effect of the dignity and grace" of her maternity. And, lastly, Eadmer, that "to proclaim this alone of the blessed Virgin, that she is the Mother of God, exceeds every height and name which, after that of God, it is possible for us to think of."†

But we have now to consider what foundation God laid when He created Mary; when He framed her for an office which raised her so far above the laws and customs of our human nature. We have to consider how the Most High did found His tabernacle. We have to consider how the eternal Word, in the infinity of His power, prepared a mother for Himself. We have to consider how the holy Spirit of grace prepared His spouse. We have to seek for the beginning of her ways, and to explain the primal cause of so much dignity and grace and purity. But, alas! conceived in sin and born in sin, living in actual sin, and bearing about us the deep scars and traces of our origin in sin, surrounded, pressed upon, and blinded by the effects of sin, in a world of sin, how can we approach so near to Jesus that we may learn from Him the grace of Mary, unless He be pleased in His infinite goodness to approach to us; unless He both purify our hearts and illuminate our minds to see this noblest work of His grace and love, this most glorious of the works of His redeeming power?

* Bishop in Gaul, Sermon v, 19. Nat. Dñi Bib. Vat. Pat. vi, p. 692.

‡ Eadmer de Excell. B. M. 2.

CHAPTER II

How the Fathers speak of the Dignity of the Mother of God

THOSE who have only read the Fathers of the Church in the brief extracts from their works, which are so often cited, can have no idea of the amplitude and magnificence with which they extol the praises of the Mother of God. I propose, therefore, in this chapter, to give more satisfactory examples of the mode in which they speak of her.

St Proclus was a disciple of St Chrysostom, and is highly commended by St Cyril, as well for his learning and piety as for his accurate observance of the discipline of the Church. In the year 429, on a feast of the blessed Virgin, in the great church of Constantinople, he preached a discourse on the Mother of God, which was received with great applause by the people. Nestorius was present, and unable to endure so much truth, he rose up and burst out with a reply.* The discourse was afterwards placed at the beginning of the Acts of the Council of Ephesus. I propose to give the first part of it. St Proclus begins :

"The Virgin's festival incites our tongue today to herald her praise. And well may this solemnity be considered fruitful to the assembled faithful. For we celebrate her, who is the argument of chastity and the glory of her sex ; her

* Marius Mercator, t. ii, pp. 19, 26, etc.

who is at once Mother and Virgin. Lovely and wonderful is this union. . . . Let nature rejoice, and mankind exult, for women have also received their honour. Let men show their delight, that virgins are held in esteem. For, *where sin abounded, there grace has superabounded.** For now the holy Mary, Virgin, Mother of God, brings us together. That undefiled treasury of virginity; that spiritual paradise of the second Adam; that laboratory of the union of natures; that mart of the commerce of salvation; that bridal chamber in which the Word espoused flesh unto Himself; that animated bush of nature, which the fire of the divine birth consumed not; truly the bright cloud, which bore Him bodily who sits upon the Cherubim; the most clean fleece of the celestial shower, with which the Shepherd put on the condition of the sheep. Mary, I say, handmaid and Mother, Virgin and heaven; the only bridge of God to men; the awful loom of the Incarnation, in which, by some unspeakable way, the garment of that union was woven, whereof the weaver is the Holy Ghost; and the spinner, the overshadowing from on high; the wool, the ancient fleece of Adam; the woof, the undefiled flesh from the Virgin; the weaver's shuttle, the immense grace of Him who brought it about; the artificer, the Word gliding through the hearing. Who ever saw, who ever heard how God dwelt in the womb, yet suffered no limitation? And now, Him whom the heavens do not contain, the Virgin's womb did nothing straiten. He is born of woman, not God only, nor merely man; and by His birth He made woman the gate of salvation, who before had been the gate of sin.

* Rom. v, 20.

For where the serpent entered through the way of disobedience, and shed his poison, there the Word, through the way of obedienoe, entered, and built a living temple for Himself. From whence Cain, the firstborn of sin, came forth, thence, without man's concurrence, came Christ, the Redeemer of our race. It shamed not the loving God to be born of woman, for it was life He was building up. He contracted no stain from His lodging in that womb which He had formed without any dishonour. For except His Mother had remained a virgin, the offspring would be but man, and the mystery of the birth would be lost. And if after bearing she remained a virgin, how shall He not be also God, and a mystery which is unutterable? He is born of no corruption, who went forth unhindered through the closed doors. And when Thomas saw His conjoined natures, he cried out and said: "My Lord and my God."* Think not, O man, that this is a birth to be ashamed of, since it was made the cause of our salvation. For if He had not been born of woman, He had not died; and if, in the flesh, He had not died, neither would He have destroyed him through death, "who had the empire of death, that is, the devil."† By no means was the architect dishonoured, for He dwelt in the house which He Himself had built. Nor did the clay soil the potter in refashioning the vessel He had moulded. Nor did aught from the Virgin's womb defile the most pure God. For as He received no stain in forming it, so He received none in proceeding from it. O womb, in which the general decree of man's freedom was written. O womb, in which the arms against the devil

* John xx, 28. † Heb. ii, 14.

were forged. O field, in which the divine husbandman grew wheat without sowing. O temple, in which God was made a priest, not changing His nature, but, through mercy clothing Himself as the priest according to the order of Melchisedec.* "The Word was made flesh," † though the Jews believed not our Lord when He said it. Truly God took the form of man, though the Gentiles deride the miracle. Wherefore St Paul exclaimed, "To the Jews a scandal and to the Gentiles foolishness. ‡ They know not the force of the mystery, because it passes their reason and comprehension. For "if they had known it, they would never have crucified the Lord of Glory. § But if the Word had not dwelt in the womb, neither would flesh have been seated on the holy throne." ‖

This commencement forms part of one of six discourses delivered by St Proclus on the blessed Virgin.

Basil, Archbishop of Seleucia, was betrayed, with many others, into signing the false Council of Ephesus, assembled in the interests of Nestorius. For this he was deposed, but afterwards he was reinstated in his see. In beginning to discourse on the greatness of the Mother of God, he reveals his sense of the deep unworthiness which in his piety he felt, because of the error he had committed.

"He," he says, "who would exalt the holy Virgin and Mother of God, will find a most ample subject for his praises. But having before me my own weakness, struck to the soul I have long delayed. . . . Oppressed with the weight of my sins, I have hesitated and delayed upon the

* Ps. cix, 4. † John i, 14. ‡ 1 Cor. i, 23. § 1 Cor. ii, 8.
‖ S. Proclus, Orat. i, in Laud. S. Mariæ, ed. Combefis.

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matter which such discourse demands. For I have thought it the work of the most clear-sighted men, of those who are eminently purified in soul and body, and that only those who have been intimately illuminated by the light of divine grace can worthily accord the praises which are due to the Mother of God. But I have nothing in me that can inspire this confidence and freedom of speaking. For my lips have not been purified like those of Isaias, who waited for the seraph with the divine coal.* Nor, like the divine Moses, have I loosened the shoes from the feet of my soul. . . . What fear ought to encompass me then, when I undertake to offer praise to the Mother of God, lest through some indiscretion I should utter words unsuited to her dignity! It is not my aim to ascend a visible mountain whence I may cleave the overspreading atmosphere, and be caught up into the midst of the stars sparkling in all their brilliancy, however such a thing were to be done; nor even rise above their orderly array, where, nearing the heavenly poles, I may take my stand upon the glorious course of their impetuous career. But, lifting my head above these, my purpose is, as far as my power will allow, with the help of the Spirit who guides to things divine, even to pass by the choirs of angels with the leaders of their ranks, and to rise above the brightness of the Thrones, the honoured dignity of the Dominations, the Principalities in their place of command, and the clear lustre of the Powers; and then the clear-sighted purity of the many-eyed Cherubim, and the six-winged Seraphim with their movements unrestrained on either

* Isa. vi, 6, 7.

side; and if there be any created being above these, I will not there stay my course or my longing desire, but will dare to fix my curious gaze intently, as far as is permitted for man in chains of flesh, and will contemplate the co-eternal brightness of the Father's glory, and, encompassed and enlightened with that true Light, will begin the hymn of praise to the Mother of God there from whence she became the Mother of God, and obtained that name and title.

"Can there be any subject more sublime than this? He who thinks so has not understood the difference between things human and things divine. For as it is not easy to know God and to speak of Him, yea, rather it is among the things that can least be done; so the great mystery of the Mother of God transcends both speech and reason. When then I speak of the Mother of God incarnate, I will ascend to God by the help of prayer, and will seek Him for the guide of my speech, and will say to Him: 'O Lord omnipotent, King of all creation, who in an incomprehensible manner dost infuse Thy spiritual light into incorporeal minds, illuminate my mind, that the subject set before me may be understood without error; may, when understood, be spoken with piety, and when spoken, may be received without hesitation.'"

Here Basil casts himself upon the mysteries of the Divinity, and then proceeds to those of the Incarnation, after which he runs through the prophecies which anticipate the coming of Christ of a Virgin Mother; and, illuminated with these truths, he passes to speak of that Virgin Mother.

"From what flowers of praise shall we cull a

garland worthy of her? From her sprang the flower of Jesse; she clothed our race with glory and with honour. What encomiums can we offer her as she deserves, when everything of this world is beneath her merits? For if St Paul pronounced these words of the other saints, that the world was not worthy of them,* what shall we say of the Mother of God, who shone with as great a splendour above the martyrs, as does the sun above the stars? It is clearly fitting we should greet her with these words of Solomon: 'Many daughters have wrought virtue, but thou hast risen above them all.'† O sacred Virgin, well may the angels exult through thee, destined as they are to the service of men, from whom, in former times, they turned away. And let Gabriel now rejoice, for to him is entrusted the message of the Divine conception, and he stands before the Virgin in great honour. Wherefore in joy and grace he auspiciously begins the message: 'Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.'‡

"Hail, full of grace. Let thy face be joyful. For from thee shall the joy of all be born; and He shall take away their ancient execration, dissolve the empire of death, and give to all the hope of resurrection. Hail, full of grace. Most flourishing paradise of chastity, in which is planted the tree of life which shall produce for all the fruits of salvation, and from which the fountain of the gospels shall stream to all believers, in floods of mercy from their fourfold source and spring. Hail, full of grace. Mediatrix between God and men, through whom the intervening barrier of enmity is cleared away and earthly

* Heb. xi, 38. † Prov. xxxi, 29. ‡ Luke i, 28.

things conjoined with those of heaven. The Lord is with thee. For thou art a temple truly worthy of God and redolent of the perfumes of chastity. In thee shall dwell the great High Priest, who, according to the order of Melchisedec, is without father and mother*—of God without mother, of thee without father. . . .

"Emmanuel then came into this world, which before He had created; a child new born, though pre-eternally existing; who lay in the crib, and was borne upon the Cherubim; who found no place in the inn, yet prepared the eternal tabernacles. . . . And the most holy Mother of the Lord of all, the true Mother of God, pondering these things in her heart,† as it is written, imbibed full draughts of joy within her, and as the greatness of her Son and her God revealed itself more and more to the eyes of her soul, her awe increased with her delight.

"As then she looked upon the divine Infant, and fastened her affections full of reverence upon Him, alone with Him, she spoke in her emotion such words as these: What fit name shall I find for Thee, my Son? A man's name shall I give Thee? But Thy conception is divine. God's name shall I give Thee? But Thou hast taken human flesh. Shall I nourish Thee with milk, or shall I glorify Thee? Shall I cherish Thee as Thy mother, or adore Thee as Thy handmaid? Shall I embrace Thee as my Son, or adore Thee as my God? Shall I present Thee my breast, or offer Thee incense? What is this greatest, this most unutterable of mysteries? Heaven is Thy seat, and Thou art carried on my breast. Thou art altogether here, with the dwellers of this earth, and Thou hast in nothing left the dwellers

* Heb. vii, 3. † Luke ii, 19.

of heaven. Nor hast Thou come here through change of place, but Thy divine condescension has brought Thee into our condition. I search not the secrets of Thy incarnation, but I entreat Thy goodness and Thy clemency."

"See what a mystery is wrought in her; how it passes both thought and speech. Who then will not admire the vast power of the Mother of God? Who will not see how far she is lifted above the saints? For if God gave to His servants a grace so great, that by their very touch they healed the sick, and the mere casting of their shadows across the street could do the same thing; if Peter, I say, with his shadow could heal the infirm,* and if when men took the handkerchief which wiped the perspiration from Paul they drove the devils away with it,† how much power, think you, did He give His Mother? And what wonder if the saints, whilst they lived and walked on earth, had such efficacious influence, when even after their death the earth could not hinder their power? For whilst their bodies lie beneath ponderous stones, if we approach to them in a worthy spirit, they bring health to those who need it. But if to the saints He has granted to do things so wonderful as these, what has He given to His Mother for her nursing? With what gifts has He adorned her? . . . If Peter is called blessed, and the keys of heaven are entrusted to him because he called Christ the Son of the living God,‡ how must she not be more blessed than all, who deserved to bear Him whom Peter confessed? And if Paul is called a vessel of election,§ because he carried the august name of Christ

* Acts v, 15. † Acts xix, 12. ‡ Matt. xvi, 16, 17, 19. § Acts ix, 15.

over the earth, what vessel is the Mother of God, who did not merely contain the manna, like the golden urn, but who in her womb bore that bread, that heavenly bread, which is the nourishment and strength of the faithful?

"But I fear, lest, whilst prepared to say more concerning her, I should say little that is worthy of her dignity, and bring the more shame upon myself. Wherefore I draw in the sail of my discourse, and retire into the harbour of silence." *

The extract which follows is from a discourse of Theodotus, Bishop of Ancyra, who was one of the most active and able antagonists of Nestorius. It is taken from his sermon on the holy Mother of God and St Simeon.†

"Let us begin with the salutation of Gabriel, the heavenly citizen: 'Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.'‡ Let us take up the greeting again. Hail, our longed-for joy: hail, glory of the Church: hail, sweetly breathing name: hail, divinely refulgent and most gracious countenance: hail, most venerable stronghold: hail, salubrious and spiritual fleece: hail, yes hail, thou clothed with light and mother of the splendour which knows no setting: hail, most undefiled mother of sanctity: hail, pellucid fountain of life-giving milk: hail, thou new mother and framer of a new birth: hail, thou new book of that new handwriting of which Isaias sings, and of which men and angels are witnesses: hail, thou alabaster vessel of the unguent of sanctification:

* Basil. Seleuc. Orat. in S. Dei Genitricem, 39. Combefis, Orat. 39, Bib. Max. Pat. viii, 481. It is uncertain whether this is by Basil; *vide* Ceillier, x, 164 and 166, new edition.

† This discourse seems to have been incorrectly attributed to St Amphilochius; *vide* Ceillier, v, p. 370 and viii, 391, new edition.

‡ Luke i, 28.

hail, thou upright dealer in the coin of virginity: hail, thou who fashioned by hand, embraced Him who fashioned thee: hail, thou who, be the limits of thy capacity what they may, yet containest Him who contains all things. . . .

"Why do you foolishly dissent from the truth? And why do you detract from, why do you deny the good pleasure of God, as it is providentially ordered in the most holy Virgin for the common salvation? For He who created the primeval virgin without reproach, framed the second also without spot or crime. And He who made the exterior beautiful, adorned the interior with holiness for the abode of the soul; which, therefore, appeared most sweet and delectable to God. . . .

"Ye Christians who are good and teachable of God, hearken to the divinely-inspired predictions of the prophets, for they everywhere exclaim of the most praiseworthy Virgin: 'The Most High hath sanctified His tabernacle. God is in the midst of her, and she shall not be moved;* man is born in her, and He the Most High hath founded her.'† But as the adversaries of the truth are carnal-minded, and have not the spirit of God, they savour spiritual things in a carnal manner. For that is true which the apostle so wisely says: "The animal man perceives not those things which are of the spirit of God."‡ And for this cause, they seek to be taught by things sought out from a distance; they are not willing from what is more near and familiar to have it shown them that the Virgin was advanced unto yet greater holiness. But things that are known to all eyes render things

* Ps. xlv, 5. † Ps. lxxxvi, 5. ‡ 1 Cor. ii, 14.

obscure perceptible to sight. As iron, then, when it holds commerce with the fire, will scatter its sparks and flakes upon all that is about or in contact with it; as it improves at the same time both in its nature and condition; as it quickly gains resemblance with the flame that so readily enkindles it; as it grows incapable of being touched by whatever may come near to it; how can it seem wonderful that the all-undefiled Virgin should, by the coming unto her of the divine and immaterial fire, be inflamed to greater purity? So that, removing whatever may be opposed to its nature,* she stands resplendent in the beauty of a nature that is most pure. And so far, indeed, that henceforth she is incapable of being closely approached, or endured, or even beheld, by those who are become degenerated through carnal vileness. And as he on whose head there is water poured, is overstreaming with the dropping fluid from head to foot; so the holy Virgin and Mother is imbued in every part of her nature by the sanctity of the Holy Ghost descending upon her: and then, at last, we believe that she received God, the living Word, into her virginal and unguent-breathing chamber."†

* Theodotus has affirmed, in the previous paragraph, that the blessed Virgin was made without spot or crime, as Eve was created without reproach, and he here illustrates that more perfect holiness, and yet more absolute purity, which arose from the descent of the Holy Ghost at the Incarnation.

† Oratio IV inter opera Sti Amphilochii.

CHAPTER III

The Law of Preparation

WE have to consider the question whether, from the first moment of her existence, the Mother of God obtained a preparation of grace and purity commensurate with her most sublime office and her maternal dignity. We must therefore first consider the laws and principles which may be supposed to govern the subject. And the first which presents itself is this very principle of preparation.

The Old Testament, in all that it embraces, is but one great example of this principle. Its history and genealogies, its rites and sacrifices, its miracles and providences, its prophets and other great personages, all are shaped out and directed by God towards the one great mystery of the incarnation of His divine Son. And as is the whole, so is each particular part. Preparation is one of the grand laws of the divine economy, and one which is everywhere apparent. And as we approach nearer to the end contemplated, so do we find the preparations more perfect, and higher grades of holiness in the instruments which God designs to employ in their accomplishment. The general law is that of a gradual advance of preparation, yet evil may still remain, and may be allowed to encompass and assault what is holy, or even to afflict and crucify it, and thus to be a means of purification or probation; but notwithstanding the presence

of evil, it is not suffered to be the source from which aught that is holy springs.

Great personages are raised up by God to prepare the way for His Son. Some begin a new epoch, and advance the order of things towards the Incarnation. Some are of our Lord's ancestry, and are specially chosen, specially sanctified, and the descent to Him limited within their line. Some are prophets, organs of the eternal Word, who partake beforehand in the knowledge of the Word made flesh. All are remarkable figures of Christ. And what we have now to observe, is the striking way in which God prepares them for their sacred offices. For in many cases this preparation is minutely recorded, though in others it is but insinuated in the divine history. We have sufficient examples given to show us that preparation is a principle of the divine economy and, as it were, a law with God. We can also see that such a preparation bears relation to the office for which each person is designed and that the nearer that office stands in relation to the Incarnation, the higher and more supernatural is the preparation which precedes it.

Thus Abraham is fixed upon to found the line from which our Lord shall spring. He is separated from his country and kindred, and is brought into very intimate communion with God. He receives a great gift of faith, and a great grace of obedience. He is put to long and severe trials. And only after all human hopes and natural expectations have passed away, does he receive the promised son. And if the descent of our Lord from Adam was limited in Abraham, the descent of our Lady from Eve was equally limited to his line, and Sarah was a

figure of her. For the Almighty said: "Sarah shall bring forth a son."* And she conceived her son after the powers of nature had expired. Abraham is met, after his victory, by Melchisedec, who is the priest of the Most High God,† and the type of the royal priesthood of Christ. St Paul says that he was without father, mother, or length of days;‡ and though this be an allegory, yet it seems to point to a mysterious origin.

Moses is predestined to be the deliverer of God's people, their lawgiver and guide, and it was predicted that Christ should be like to him.§ His preparation for his office begins with his existence. And the very law intended for the destruction of his race becomes the cause that brings about that preparation. He is saved by divine interposition in his infancy,‖ brought up at the court of Pharao in the learning and wisdom of the Egyptians, and God adorns his mind with special graces for his future office.

Joseph, that great figure of the Saviour of the world, is born because "God remembered Rachel, heard her, and opened her womb."¶ And after his miraculous conception, his early life consists of a singular course of preparations leading him to his future office.

David is designed to commence that royal line in which our Lord's descent is again limited. He is called from his youth, anointed by anticipation,** and God is with him until He seats him on the throne of Juda.

Isaac is the great figure of our Lord, as well in his birth as in his sacrifice,†† and he, therefore,

* Gen. xviii, 10. † Gen. xiv, 18. ‡ Heb. vii, 3.
§ Deut. xviii, 15. ‖ Exod. ii, 3, 4. ¶ Gen. xxx, 22.
** 1 Kings, xvi, 13. †† Gen. xvii, 19; xxii, 2.

is miraculously conceived. Samson is raised up "to begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines."* He is the figure of Christ's victorious power. An angel announces his conception,† and before his existence has begun special laws are prescribed for his observance.

Samuel opened the line of the great prophets. He also anoints the royal lineage of Christ in the person of David. His mother is barren, and he is a child of prayer. He is vowed to God ere his existence, is brought up in the temple, and in his childhood God converses with him.‡ God also prepared Daniel with grace and wisdom from his childhood. Isaias is the evangelist before the Gospel, the prophet by eminence of the Incarnation. We have no account of his birth, but before he began to prophesy he had a special preparation. The seraph cleansed his lips with a burning coal from the altar.§ Jeremias is the prophet of the Passion, and the figure of our Lord's sorrows. And to him the Almighty says: "Before I made thee in the bowels of thy mother, I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb, I sanctified thee and made thee a prophet unto the nations."‖

But the long-expected hour of the Incarnation is at hand, and one is raised up whose especial office it is more directly to prepare the way before the Son of God.¶ And for this singular office, exercised so near to the Son of God, we find, as we might have expected from what has gone before, that he receives a most singular preparation for his sacred office. Holy and aged parents are selected by God, an archangel comes and announces to them his conception, and prescribes a

* Judges xiii, 5. † Judges xiii, 3, 5. ‡ 1 Kings i, 11; iii, 1.
§ Isa. vi, 6. ‖ Jer. i, 5. ¶ Luke i, 76.

law for the child. That conception is miraculous. "He is filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb."* Nor have we yet reached the end of the wonders that surround the origin of our Lord's precursor. At the awful moment of the Annunciation Gabriel says to Mary: "And behold thy cousin Elizabeth, she also hath conceived a son in her old age; and this is the sixth month with her that is called barren; because no word shall be impossible with God."† Thus John's miraculous conception is made the proof to Mary of God's power, and of His will, and of the ripeness of the time for its fulfilment. And no sooner did she hear of that miraculous conception than she bowed down her will to God and said: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to thy word."‡ Mary hastens to visit Elizabeth. Elizabeth hears the salutation of Mary, and the moment the sound of Mary's voice is heard the child of Elizabeth leaps for joy. It is the first sounding of Mary's voice which is the sign for these graces. For Jesus gives His graces from the silent womb, and speaks through the voice of Mary. And Elizabeth herself is filled with the holy Ghost, and she exclaims: "Whence is this to me that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?"§ Then Mary breaks forth in her rapturous canticle.

The various offices we have been considering had their cause in the Incarnation of the Son of God. They looked towards that mystery of mysteries, and prepared the way for its accomplishment. And when we consider how those great personages who were pre-elected to fulfil them were prepared and pre-sanctified, can we suppose

* Luke i, 15. † Luke i, 36, 37. ‡ Luke i, 38. § Luke i, 43.

that she who was pre-elected for the greatest and the most pre-eminent of all offices, that she, in whose very person that mystery was to receive its consummation, was not prepared and pre-sanctified in a yet more perfect manner? The preparation of those who preceded her began early, sometimes at their very origin, or came, at any rate, previous to their immediate call to their special office, whether as links in the lineage of Jesus, or as anticipating Him in their persons, or as prophetically conceiving the eternal Word in their minds and bringing it forth in speech. But Mary was the mother, whilst they were but the ancestors; Mary embraced what they but anticipated; Mary conceived Him truly whom they conceived but mentally. They were but the ministers of God; she was the Mother of God, and, under God, the one co-operator of the Incarnation through the submission of her will. "If Jeremias," as a writer of the time of St Anselm says, "who prophesied in groanings, was sanctified in the womb; and if St John, the precursor of the Lord, was filled with the Holy Ghost in the womb of his mother, who dares to maintain that the ark of the propitiatory of the whole world was deprived of the illumination of the Holy Spirit?" *

Consider for a moment that long-descended ancestry of Christ. Patriarchal and kingly as it is, from what cause does it derive its glory? Not like other great lines from its first founder, but from its last descendant. Abraham, Jacob and David are so great, because Mary is to be their daughter. When they have given birth to her, they have accomplished that for which they were

* De Conceptione B.M.V.

appointed, and the line of David disappears from history. She is the sum and complement of all those preparations. Christ is the Son of David, and the Son of Abraham, because He is the Son of Mary. And she embraces the Son of God as her child, whom they embrace but as a Son through her.

When a temple was to be built for the habitation of God, it was God Himself who drew the plan. David was not to build it because he was a man of blood; but the wise and peaceful Solomon was chosen for its builder. The preparations were magnificent beyond description, and it was put together in silence. "And the house when it was in building, was built of stones, hewed and made ready, so that there was neither hammer nor axe, nor any tool of iron heard in the house when it was in building."* And David tells us the cause when he says that "a dwelling is prepared, not for man, but for God." †

And so was Mary prepared and built up a living temple for the indwelling of God. Silently was she prepared, but with a magnificence of grace of which the magnificence of the material temple was but the figure. For when we consider that Jesus, in His infinite holiness, was not only separated from sin, but also separated from sinners, ‡ as St Paul tells us, we cannot suppose that He took His flesh from a sinner, dwelt in a sinner, and came forth from a sinner, that He might be nursed and ruled and commanded by that sinner for so many years. We cannot but anticipate that He who sanctified so many to prepare His ways, did in a most singular manner prepare and sanctify His living temple, when He made it, and that He made

* 3 Kings vi, 7. † 1 Par. xxix, 1. ‡ Heb. vii, 26.

His own most blessed Mother both without sin and full of grace. Hence a writer of the time and school of St Augustine introduces our Lord creating His Mother, as a refutation of the impieties of the Manicheans: "Whom art thou despising, O Manichean? She is My Mother. I framed her with My hands. I made the Mother of whom I should be born. I prepared the path for My coming."*

St John Damascene, in one of his discourses on the Blessed Virgin, has drawn a comparison between the creation of earth with its heavenly canopy as a dwelling-place for man—that mother earth from whose substance the divine Artist formed the body of man so fearfully and so wonderfully—and that more noble creation of His grace, by which He prepared Mary in body as from earth and in soul as from heaven to be a Mother for His Son. This is that earth of which Isaias sings, that it shall "be opened and bud forth a Saviour."† This is that tabernacle which is manifest unto the God of Jacob; for a most holy place is prepared for the most holy Word. Let Jacob then cry out, "This is no other than the house of God and the gate of heaven."‡ When man through infinite goodness was brought into existence, the heavens were expanded and the earth was spread beneath, and the sea was closed up within its bounds, and all things were produced for the adornment of the universe. Then, after all, man, royally adorned, was placed in Paradise as in a school of virtue.

But when destruction has begun its course, lest what God had made should go to ruin and

* L. contra Hæres. v, inter opera spuria S. Aug.
† Isa. xlv, 8. ‡ Gen. xxviii, 17.

perdition, He made a new heaven and earth and sea, in which that He might reform the human race through higher counsel, He might Himself be contained whom nothing ever can contain. This is that Blessed Virgin illustrious in so many ways. O marvellous work! She is that heaven, for from the most secret treasures of her virginity shone forth the Sun of Justice. She is that earth from whose undefiled soil grew the wheat of life. She is that sea which from its deep womb produced the spiritual pearl. How magnificent is this world! What a stupendous creation! Of her Zacharias sings: "Rejoice, and be glad, O daughter of Sion; for behold I come, and will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the Lord."* And of her it is that Joel exclaims: "O earth, be glad and rejoice, for the Lord hath done great things."† For she is that earth in which, by the Holy Spirit, He was founded in the flesh, of whom it is sung: "Who founded the earth in its stability."‡ She is that earth in which sprang up no thorn of sin, but through whose germination sin was rooted out. She is that earth, not cursed, like the former earth, tangled with thorns and briars, but the earth on which came the blessing of the Lord, since the fruit of her womb was blessed, as it is spoken in the sacred oracle."§

* Zach. ii, 10. † Joel ii, 21. ‡ Ps. ciii, 5.
§ Contracted from S. J. Damasc. 2 Hom. de Nativ. B.M.V.

CHAPTER IV

The Principle of Exception from Law

EVERY law has its exceptions. And it is a maxim that the exception confirms the law. Nor is this principle limited to human laws. It is found in the natural and in the supernatural, in the divine and in the human ordering of things. And when we take the whole assemblage of laws into our consideration, the principle of exception rises above them as a superior law. It contemplates motives beyond the motives of the law. It proves the freedom of the Lawgiver. And the ground of its operation is found to lie in some object which is exterior to and exalted above the common state of things. It implies the intervention of a higher power than is indicated by the sanction of the law; and the accomplishment of some more exalted end or purpose than the law contemplates. Thus miracles are exceptions to the fixed and constant laws of nature, and their object is the mystery of redemption and the laws of grace and holiness.

Take the law of the divine commandments. The expression of that sacred law is universal; "Thou shalt not kill."* But when the safety of society itself is at stake, the magistrate wields the sword of justice which God has put into his hand. Take the laws of human society, they are universal in their terms, and embrace within their scope the whole of the members of the body

* Exod. xx, 13.

politic; and yet, for the salvation of that body, the king is lifted above the law.

Let us consider this principle in examples from God's dealings with or in His creatures. What law is more universal than that by which fire burns and consumes? And it may be well to remember that the fuel of sin is the figure by which divines express the concupiscence which reigns through mankind from original sin. Yet when, by command of the King of Babylon, the furnace had been heated sevenfold, the three children walked unharmed and felt refreshed in its flames.* And the bush which burned in the sight of Moses and was not consumed,† is a favourite figure with the Fathers for the Blessed Virgin. It is a law equally universal that rivers flow on and seek their level. But when that symbol of Jesus and Mary, the Ark of the Covenant, was to enter into the promised land, the waters of the Jordan held back their floods, and stood like a wall of crystal until the ark passed over.‡ No law is more fixed and enduring than that by which the sun and planets move in their orbits. Yet, that the victory of Israel might be completed, the sun was arrested in his course.§

We have a most remarkable exception from a universal law in the persons of Enoch and Elias. In them the law of death, that fruit of original sin, is arrested,‖ and without death they are translated that they may return again to the world after the order of ages has been unfolded. We have already considered an exception from universal law in Sarah; how, after being exhausted

* Dan. iii. † Exod. iii, 2. ‡ Jos. iii, 13.
§ Jos. x, 12, 13. ‖ Gen. v, 24; 4 Kings ii, 2.

by age, God enabled her to bring forth a son.* And we have another remarkable exception to the moral law itself in Abraham. For what law is there more binding than this, that a father shall cherish the life of his son? But Abraham draws a sword with the full intention of slaying his son, and placing his body on the fiery pile, and it is reputed to him unto justice.† Take, again, the sacramental law. Baptism is the remedy for original sin, the one and only way prescribed for our escape from its contagion. Our Lord declared that "Unless a man be born again of water and of the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven."‡ Here is a law co-extensive with that of original sin, and founded upon its universality; and yet it admits of an exception. For he who for the faith is put to death before he has received that birth through water, receives the mystery of redemption through the shedding of his blood.

But of the exemption of Mary from the law of spiritual death, the figure of Esther is perhaps one of the most interesting of illustrations. Esther is described in Scripture as being exceedingly fair and of incredible beauty,§ and agreeable and acceptable to the eyes of all persons. King Assuerus loved her more than all women, and made her his queen.‖ Aman, the enemy of God's people, plots against that people, and obtains a decree from the king for the destruction of the entire race.¶ Esther, who is reminded by Mordecai that she has received a kingdom for such an occasion as this, enters into the presence of the king. "She trembles, her mind is full of anguish and fear . . . . her colour turns pale,

* Gen. xxi, 2. † Gen. xxii, 1; James ii, 21. ‡ John iii, 5.
§ Esther ii, 7, 15. ‖ Esther ii, 17. ¶ Esther iii, 8.

and she rests her weary head upon her handmaid."* And God changes the spirit of the king. In all haste he leaps from his throne, he upholds her in his arms, and he says: "What is the matter, Esther? . . . . Fear not. Thou shalt not die. This law is not made for thee, but for all others."† And whilst Esther is proclaimed to be exempted from the law, she becomes the instrument through which her race is saved.‡ As the great leading principles of human law are so often but the reflection of a divine order of things, it may be well to consider how the civil law regarded a case like that of Esther. Ulpian says, "The prince is not subject to the law; but though the princess be subject, yet the prince concedes the same privileges to her which he has himself."§

But in Mary the King of Heaven accomplished His spiritual nuptials with our nature. And she is the most wonderful example of exception to the common laws of our nature in so many ways. No mortal, no angel, no creature ever was before, or will be again, the Mother of God. Next to her divine Son, the created universe has nothing like to her. And from how many laws is she excepted! She is a mother without man's concurrence. She is mother of Him who is at once God and man. She is a mother whilst she remains a virgin. She is exempted from the curse of Eve, that fruit of original sin, and brings forth her Son without pain or sorrow. Her child is born, whilst her virginal integrity is preserved. She nourishes God at her breast. She commands Him by her words, and He is subject to her. In these instances, as in a thousand others, she is an excep-

* Esther xv, 8, 10. † Esther xv, 11, 12, 13. ‡ Esther xvi.
§ Ulpian. Princeps de Legibus.

tion to every law. The Scripture says that "in many things we all offend;* and that a just man shall fall seven times."† But it is the general teaching and the general belief of the Church that though in the nature of things she could have done so, yet never did Mary commit an actual sin. It is the law of the resurrection that it shall not take place until the judgement; but though, like her divine Son, the Mother of God paid that debt of nature, which implied no sin in either the Son or in the Mother, yet it is piously believed that Jesus did not allow her most pure and virginal body to see corruption, but assumed it into heaven. Nor did any one ever hear that the relics of that holy body were to be sought for or produced on earth.

When we contemplate a life which stands so far above the common conditions of our human nature—a life which presents to us such striking exceptions to its laws; does not our very reason lead us to look into its commencement for one exception more which may yield to us an explanation of its entire course? If the Mother of God is exempted from all such effects of the curse as in their nature tend to dishonour and degradation, does not her exemption from the curse itself present both the simplest and the fullest explanation of her other exceptions?

And certainly He who preserved the three children from being touched by the fire in the midst of which they walked uninjured,‡ and who preserved the bush unconsumed in the midst of the burning fire,§ could preserve Mary untouched from the burning flame of concupiscence. He who took up Elias in the fiery chariot, so that he

* Jas iii, 2. † Prov. xxiv, 16. ‡ Dan. iii, 24. § Exod. iii, 2.

tasted not of death,* could, in the chariot of His ardent love, set Mary on high above the law of sin. He who sent down the dews of heaven upon Gideon's fleece, whilst all besides was dry and parched,† could send the dew of His graces upon the immaculate and most pure Virgin, whilst it was dry upon all the world besides. And He who held back the waves of the Jordan that the ark of the Old Testament might pass untouched and honoured through its bed,‡ could hold back the wave of Adam, lest it should overflow the ark of the New Testament beneath its defiling floods. For that we are born in the crime of Adam and with original sin is not a result of absolute necessity, but of the divine will. And if He who ordained this penalty had already solved it in part when, ere His birth, He sanctified the holy precursor of His coming,§ much more could He solve it altogether when He sanctified His holy Mother.

For He, who could have limited Adam's sin unto himself, can ward off that sin from Mary. And what He could, that He willed to do. For why should He not have willed it? Because the Most blessed Virgin was included in the compact with Adam and his race? But God, in His eternal foresight and knowledge, might not have included her. And again the question returns: God could do it, why then should He not do it? That she might receive the grace of redemption? But it is a greater grace and a greater redemption that preserves her from the fall than would have been required to raise her after falling. That she might be more humble after her fall? And certainly humility was that virtue in Mary which

* 4 Kings ii, 11. † Judges vi, 37, 38. ‡ Jos. iii, 13.
§ Luke i, 15.

drew the eyes of God upon her. But far greater and more perfect is the humility of the innocent than the humility of the criminal. Humility increases with the dignity of holiness and the greatness of God's gifts, and this is manifest in the example of our blessed Lord Himself, who, as man, was the most humble of all creatures. It was enough for Mary's humility that she might have fallen, had she not been upheld by Him who "did great things to her."* Was justice in the way? But the divine Justice had exacted its terrible account when it involved the whole race of Adam in his guilt, and shut the gate of heaven against them; when even the very Mother of God was by nature comprised beneath the law, and could only be rescued from its operation by a most magnificent act of clemency. But the Son fulfilled each law of justice, both the law of condemnation and the law of filial piety, and the law of His own honour, when He paid the great price of His Mother's redemption, and preserved her from dishonour, and brought not occasion against her, nor any accusation, and was born of her innocence.

And if indeed our human reason be a reflection of the divine reason, and human laws of divine laws; and if the universal reason and the spirit of all laws would rise up astonished and distressed to see a son accuse his mother, prove her guilty and bring her to the death, when he had power abundantly to save her from that ignominy, can we look upon Jesus, upon Jesus the perfect man, upon Jesus the God-man, upon Jesus the model and example of all men and of all sons; and then imagine, and that without proof, nay, with proof to the contrary, that He, who

* Luke i, 49.

is both judge and accuser, left His Mother in the common wreck and condemnation, when it needed only His will to save her from it, and yet to satisfy all justice?

What St Augustine says on another mystery is equally applicable to this: "Whatever occurs to you in the truth of reason as what should be done, know that God, who is the giver of all good things, has done it." * And it is in the spirit of this maxim that the great doctor of grace exclaims: "Except the Blessed Virgin, of whom I will have no question where sin is concerned, for the honour of the Lord." †

But God could have made Mary immortal as well as immaculate, and why then did He not also do this? For an obvious reason. The death of the body is not an evil in itself like sin and culpability. It may become the occasion of the noblest virtues. Our Lord was crowned with glory for His death. And His Mother shared death with Him. But original sin is an abomination before God.

* S. Aug. L. 3 de Lib. Arbitrio, cv, 13.
† S. Aug. L. 1 de Nat. et Grat. xxxvi, 42.

CHAPTER V

The Law of Gradation in Perfection; and the Law of the Accumulation of Excellence

GOD has ordered His creation on a most wonderful scale of ascension. One order of creation rises above another; kingdom above kingdom; tribe above tribe; species above species; and individual above individual within the same species. Between the grain of sand on which man treads without a thought, and the seraph who lives on the ecstatic contemplation of God, we can find nothing in common, except that each has a created existence. The huge round bulk of the earth has an incomparably inferior order of existence to that of the poor worm that crawls upon a speck of its surface. For the earth exists for the worm but not for itself, whilst the despised worm has the sense both of its own existence and of the existence of the earth on which it crawls and feeds.

The mineral has but an insensate existence; the plant has organization and growth, and draws subsistence from the mineral; the animal has life, sense and instinct, and draws its subsistence from the plant; man, to the inferior life of the animal, which nourishes and serves him, joins an intellectual existence; whilst the angel is more like to God, by the purely spiritual nature of his being. But each of these kingdoms of the creation possesses in a more excellent and eminent way the qualities and attributes of the order which is inferior to it. Thus

man has existence in common with the mineral, organization and growth with the plant, power of sensation with the animal, and intellect and a free will as his own especial attributes; whilst the angel is endowed with the excellence of man in a yet more noble manner. The angel has man's activity without his need of repose, man's intelligence purged of obscuration, and man's love without his fears. Each of the three hierarchies of angels surpasses the one below it by more eminent gifts of excellence. Each hierarchy contains its three orders, and each order of those blessed spirits comprises countless individuals, who differ one from another as star from star in excellence and glory. The seraph illuminates the cherub, the cherub illuminates the thrones, and each order administers to the order next in dignity; whilst the angel is the minister of man, and man of the inferior creation. But God reigns through all and gives to all according to their nature and His goodness. And the excellence of each of those created natures lies in the degree in which it is a reflection of its Creator. But whilst the excellence of the insensible creature lies but in the fact of its existence, and in a certain order impressed upon it, and mutely reflecting the divine reason of its Creator, the excellence of the spiritual order of creation lies not only in the image and likeness of God, but also in a certain communion with His eternal power, truth and goodness.

This brings us from the order of nature to the order of grace. As no two men are alike, so no two saints are alike. The supernatural order is as endlessly diversified as the natural order. God mocks not Himself, nor does He make copies from any of His works. Hence no two creatures

are alike. No two minds, no two hearts, and no faces are alike. The law of individuality rests on the law of unceasing variety. Take the two individuals who have the closest resemblance to each other, and the more you study them, the more strikingly will their differences come out. But those distinctions lie in some further departure from, or some nearer approach to, one common idea of excellence; in some power, some quality or some gift, which is possible to human nature, and belongs to the type of our species. The miser lives, in his mind and heart, on the lowest kingdom of the mineral world, on acres or on gold. The epicure sets the enjoyment of his life on the vegetable and animal creation placed beneath his feet. The impure sensualist lives on the animal portion of his own nature. The proud man lives on the fancied subjection of other minds to his. The saint lives in his mind and in his heart on God. How immeasurable the distance between the savage and a St John, the disciple of love; or between the proud philosopher and a St Paul, expending himself for his brethren. Between such degradation of our nature on the one side, and such elevation towards the sanctity and power of God on the other, who can measure or comprehend the distance? And even between sanctity and sanctity how vast are the spaces in given examples!

St Paul dilates on the diversity of gifts in the saints. They are not only of different orders, but each order contains an endless diversity of individual examples. "There are diversities of graces, but the same spirit. And there are diversities of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but the same God,

who worketh all in all." * And, speaking in a more ample manner of that gradation and diversity which reigns throughout the natural order, and comparing it with the gradation in the supernatural order, the Apostle again says: "All flesh is not the same flesh, but one is the flesh of men, another of beasts, another of birds, and another of fishes. And there are bodies celestial and bodies terrestrial: but one is the glory of the celestial, and another of the terrestrial. One is the glory of the sun, another the glory of the moon, and another the glory of the stars. For star differs from star in glory." † And our Lord Himself says of the gradation of that glory: "In My Father's house there are many mansions. . . . I go to prepare for you a place." ‡

From this law of diversity, which excludes all absolute resemblance or identity in individuals, it follows that there must be one example in each order of excellence more perfect than the rest. And that example is not only the most excellent, but it must in an eminent manner embrace in itself the various excellencies exemplified in all the instances which stand beneath it. Take this in the natural order. Amongst poets there is but one Homer; amongst orators one Demosthenes; amongst contemplative philosophers one Plato.

Art in its high and true sense brings us to the same conclusion. It is the idealization of nature, the raising up of the mind from individual examples to the highest and most perfect type. And if the perfect form of man be under consideration, we have but one unsurpassed ideal, the famous statue of the Vatican; of the form of woman, but one unrivalled type, the equally

* 1 Cor. xii, 4, 5, 6. † 1 Cor. xv, 39-41. ‡ John xiv, 2.

famous statue of the Florentine gallery. These are the perfect and unapproachable types of the twofold form of man, as represented in art. Whatever excellence is found separately in other examples is found perfect and in the completest harmony in them.

Or to take the order of grace. If we consider the gradation of excellence in the saints, whether in illumination or in charity, we shall find we have, amongst Fathers, but one St Augustine; amongst divines, but one St Thomas; amongst episcopal rulers, but one St Charles; amongst workers of charity but one St Vincent of Paul; as amongst Apostles but one pre-eminent Apostle of love, and one Apostle of the Gentiles.

Virtue as distributed in different souls, or as accumulated in one individual, does not give results which can be easily brought into comparison. A thousand instances of some ordinary degree of grace and of corresponding virtue, in as many Christian souls, can scarcely be put in comparison with a thousand degrees of grace and holiness accumulated in a single soul. For the higher degrees of virtue as of grace are of a different order and of another kind of excellence. It is not so much by the rarity of those highest examples, as by the force and splendour, the unitive power and fertility in great results, which redound from a high degree of purity, charity and the light of wisdom united in some noble and elevated soul, that our common humanity is most exalted and God most glorified. How many Christians possessing but ordinary degrees of faith and love, think you, would it require to render as much glory to God and as great a help and ex-

ample to men, as the faith and love of the single soul of St John? And how many ordinary Christians, combining all their lights and virtues, could do the works of St Paul—works so mighty that they are fertile in fruits even to this day?

To illustrate this principle by its extreme example. Our Lord accumulated in His sacred person, during the sufferings of His mortal life, the graces and merits which redeem and sanctify the human race. In His sacred humanity He gave immeasurably more glory to God than all saints and angels, and human nature itself was exalted to its utmost perfection through its head in His sacred person.

When God then accumulates graces in a very high degree in some one individual, He lifts up human nature in the same degree, and thereby He works to His own greater praise and glory. But this is not all. In making these favours manifest to men, He is pleased to make a great provision for their service. For through that wonderful disposition, by which all that is superior in the hierarchy of holiness illuminates and brings help to the inferior, the saints are prepared by God not only, as the angels were, to succour and defend us here on earth, and to advocate our interests in heaven, but also by shedding on our path the light of their example to encourage us to follow in the path they trod.

In the mind of God there is one perfect type of man, and in that perfect type the varieties of excellence in the several classes and individuals are eminently contained, and in the highest degree made perfect. Has God filled up this type in His creation, or can we suppose that it is to be for ever a barren and unrealized idea? No,

that type of man, which the Almighty for ever contemplates in His Eternal Word, is the glory of His creation. It is the Eternal Word Himself made flesh. Jesus is the head and type of all human excellence. He is the one perfect man; of unapproachable excellence in every kind of perfection. He is at once King, Prophet, High Priest, Father of men as the new Adam, and divinest of Victims and Martyrs. And as He sums up in Himself each order of perfection, so through the hypostatic union, He is absolutely perfect, and in Him the whole fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily.

But whilst we find the type, the model, the head and very crown of human perfection, beyond which it is impossible to ascend, in our blessed Lord and Saviour, where shall we look for the highest form and example of excellence in woman? For though our Lord is the head of the whole of humanity, yet of its two counterparts, man, not woman, was united with the divine personality. Where then shall we find that woman so perfect that none more perfect can be supposed? Where, in other words, is the type and head of womanhood? As Christ is the counterpart of Adam, she must be the counterpart of Eve. As Eve brought sin into the world, she must bring into the world the redemption from sin. To place her at the head of women she must have these two qualities; she must have a nearer resemblance to God and a greater union with God than all others. And she must sum up within her person, eminently and surpassingly, the several excellences to be found in every order of female excellence. But this supreme excellence of woman as the type and head of womanhood is only to be found

in the Blessed Virgin. She is more like to God from her maternal resemblance to her Son. She is more like to God as bringing forth the eternal Word in the flesh in time, whom the Father has begotten of His substance from eternity. She is incomparably more united to God than any other mere creature, from her espousal with the Holy Ghost and her maternal union with her Divine Son. She resumes the excellence of every saintly order of her sex, and is at once Queen, Virgin, Spouse of God, Spouse of man, Mother of the Man-God, Prophetess and Martyr—for her sword of grief was both predicted and endured. If she be not sinless and most pure, then never was there woman sinless and most pure; and the type of woman as excellent, as perfect, and unsurpassed as even man can contemplate, and which therefore God contemplates most perfectly, was never realized, and God has not filled up the ideal plan of creation. And we are compelled to think that a more perfect woman than the Mother of God is yet possible, and that Christ, who is ever "separated from sinners,"* took flesh from a sinner, and one who had been under the devil's yoke. As the mind springs back in horror from this thought, let us then consider Mary as the head of woman and the counterpart of Eve. And what place is she assigned in the grand scale of creation? There are diversities of graces, and ministries, and operations, which the same Spirit works in all the several members of that body,† of which Christ is the head. And to her is given the grace of the divine maternity, the operation of the divine maternity, and the ministry of the divine maternity. In that great body, therefore,

* Heb. vii, 26. † 1 Cor. xii, 4, 5.

of the redeemed, next to her divine Son, who is its head, she is the first in all graces, rights and privileges. And thus she stands forth, the head and type of woman in every grace and every perfection. Her Son is God and she is but a creature; but of all mere creatures she is the one most closely allied to God. She most perfectly resembles Him. She has the greatest influence with Him. And as in all that ascending scale of created spirits endowed with the divine grace, even the brightest seraph grows dim before the soul of our Blessed Lord, filled to eternal overflow with the perfection of the Divinity; so Mary has inherited even a more excellent name than the seraph. For what seraph can say to his Lord and Head, "Thou art my Son"?* Hence the Fathers of the Church, from the earliest to the latest times, have rivalled each other in placing the Mother of God above all the choirs of angels, and next to her Son in power and glory. And hence the Church can understand only of her amongst all women the words of the Holy Ghost unto the spouse, "One is my dove, my perfect one is but one." †

St Anselm resumes the doctrine of all the Fathers when he says, "That Christ might be conceived of a most pure Mother, it was fitting and becoming that that Virgin should be resplendent with a purity so great that, under God, no greater can be presented to the comprehension of the intellect."‡ And St Thomas says, "She touched upon the confines of divinity."§ And even a Protestant divine, Bishop Hall, has ventured to say: "How worthily is she honoured of men, whom the angel pro-

* Ps. ii, 7. † Cant. vi, 8. ‡ L. de Concep. Virg. cap. 18.
§ Lib. iii Sent. d. xxii, q. iii, a. 3, q[la] 3.

claimed beloved of God! O Blessed Mary! He cannot bless thee, he cannot honour thee too much, that deifies thee not."* In the language of Hesychius she is "the elect amongst women, the most select amongst virgins, the brightest honour of our nature, the singular ornament of our earthly race."† St Fulgentius has especially contemplated the Blessed Virgin as "the restoration of woman." He shows how she passed through every state and office of her sex, that all might find a model and a help in her, and that as the new Eve she might recover and raise up the fallen state of woman.‡

This then has Mary done for woman as the head and type of her sex. She has freed her from a state of bondage, and has lifted her up from her degradation. On Eve the Almighty laid a special curse: "I will multiply thy sorrows and thy conceptions; in sorrow shalt thou bring forth children, and thou shalt be under thy husband's power, and he shall have dominion over thee."§ Here is indicated a severe yoke and bitter trials. For though man from the beginning was the head, yet woman was ordained for his companion and helpmate. But between the fall and the coming of the Gospel woman is everywhere in a state of bondage and of servitude beneath the power of man, and everywhere the wife is guarded with excessive jealousy. Even in the old law polygamy is both permitted and practised by the holiest men, and because of the hardness of men's hearts,‖ as our Lord Himself has said, divorce obtained a legal sanction;

* Serm. II. The Annunciation of Christ.

† De Laudibus Mariæ.

‡ Inter opera spuria S. Aug., Serm. de Tem. cxxiii, in Nat. Dñi vii, 2.

§ Gen. iii, 16. ‖ Matt. xix, 8.

and to this day, beyond the sphere of Christianity, woman is still in the condition of a slave.

What, then, has raised our mothers and our sisters from so low and degraded a condition? Mary was given to us. In her Eve was set free and made resplendent. All her daughters have shared in the honour of this new Mother. Mary has brought grace and favour to all women. They are reverenced through reverence for her; and when, amongst a people of faith, woman calls for protection in her distress and anguish, "For the honour of the Blessed Virgin," she reveals the foundation on which the respect due to her rests.

But Mary has delivered woman in a yet more striking way: she has given honour to the state of virginity. She has established it as a state of life by her example and her influence. Woman is made free, because she has a choice of states: she may keep her freedom to the Lord her God, or she may give it to a husband; and this power of choice, which the grace of the Holy Spirit guides, has given a dignity to woman which grows the more exalted in our minds the more deeply we reflect upon it. She who in her youthful innocence becomes the spouse of Christ and leads a life of divine and contemplative love in the presence of her God, and she who devotes herself to the same Lord in His suffering members, and becomes a sister of charity, owes her happiness and dignity to Mary; and this holy state has thrown a halo of sanctity and freedom around the entire lot of woman, whilst she who gives herself to a husband has given so far more precious a gift, as she might have been consecrated to God alone; and when she becomes a mother she rejoices in a respect paid to her

maternity, which derives its dignity from the type of all mothers. This wonderful restoration, as it arose with the uprising of the Church and took its origin from the perfect Virgin and Mother, was more striking then than now, since from long custom it looks like the natural order of things.

Wherever the Church has been overwhelmed through worldliness and error; wherever Mary has ceased to influence, and tradition concerning her has become hesitating, there the reverence for woman has begun to retrograde. Two remarkable consequences have shown themselves: the virgins of Christ are despised and ruthlessly assailed, for there is no more faith to be found in that high happiness of which grace can make them capable; and the state of motherhood becomes so far lowered that the Jewish doctrines of divorce, which our Lord abolished, find entrance once more into the laws.

Every Catholic virgin, then, and every Catholic matron instinctively feels that the type and model of woman is immaculate and sinless. They rest themselves on Mary as on the glory and strength of their sex. No female saint ever uttered a doubt as to Mary's sinless purity, and even the penitent Magdalene, as she recovers her lost innocence, draws the argument more strongly from her deep and bitter experience of what it is to be a child of Satan, and she flies for refuge and strength to the feet of a most pure and immaculate Mother; whilst the Church exclaims in her faith, "God made the most perfect of women that could be made when he made the Blessed Virgin for His Mother; therefore He made her sinless and immaculate."

CHAPTER VI

In what Sense are we to understand the Mystery of the Immaculate Conception?

THE confusion of two facts, which in their nature as in their causes are distinct and most completely apart, has given occasion to all the difficulties which have attended as well the comprehension as the contemplation of this most pure and sublime mystery which is under our consideration. A child derives not all its creation at one instant and from one source, for each child has two conceptions: and it is not of that one, which the word "conception" commonly suggests, that we are now speaking. The body is transmitted through the parents, the soul is infused by God. The transmission of the body, whereby we are of the one body of Adam, is called by divines the active conception; the infusion of the soul, whereby the body receives its animation, is called the passive conception. The distinction between these two conceptions was not scientifically drawn at the period anterior to St Thomas and St Bonaventure, and the want of the distinction at an earlier period explains the seeming contradiction, for it is only an apparent one, which is found in certain writings of some few of the western Fathers and Divines at an earlier period than the thirteenth century. It is true that Pope Innocent III, in his book on the Contempt of the World, had spoken of the two-fold conception—the one

caused by the parents, the other contracted by their offspring.* Science has not been able to fix the period of animation; but at whatever time it may take place, it is certain that the body is transmitted and organized ere the soul is infused, though the interval were but the least of which cognizance can be taken. For the infusion of the soul from God is consequent on the transmission of the body, and cannot be identical with that act or with its causes.

We must further observe, as very important for understanding the subject, that the body, before it has received the animating soul, is not the subject, but only the cause of sin. Deriving from its origin the poison of concupiscence, it has its disordered energies awakened into activity by animation; and the soul, created and infused without justifying grace, to which as a child of Adam it has lost all claim, becomes overwhelmed in its disorder, subjected to its blind confusion and distorted from rectitude, until by the grace of Christ it is regenerated through baptism. But whilst through that holy sacrament the soul is raised up from injustice to life, the body remains subject to its infirmity, and has to be subdued and kept under until it yields up the soul in death: for the flesh is only regenerated at the resurrection.

Speaking with the strictest degree of accuracy, the transmission of flesh from Adam is not the conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, but the conception of St Ann. Of several mothers the scripture says, "She conceived a son."† But previous to animation that flesh is not a human subject and possesses no moral qualities: in

* De Contemptu Mundi, i, 4; Migne, Pat. L. 217, col. 703.
† Gen. xxi, 2.

fact it is not Mary. Mary is truly conceived when her soul is created and infused into that body.

Separating, then, these two periods of time, whatever may be the distance between them, the question regards not the embryo, which is not humanity, which has no personality, and which is incapable of spiritual grace. The question regards the moment of rational animation; of the reception or, more truly, of the conception of the soul and the instant of its union with the body. To use the words of Perrone,* who follows Alexander VII., Benedict XIV.,† and all modern divines, the true question is, whether the soul of the Blessed Virgin was adorned at its creation with sanctifying grace, and whether, therefore, her animation or passive conception was immaculate and exempt from all sin.

This is clearly explained and defined to be the question in the celebrated Constitution of Alexander VII of December 8, 1661.‡ The pontiff says, "It is the ancient and pious belief of the faithful of Christ, towards this most blessed Mother, the Virgin Mary, that her soul, at the first instant of its creation and infusion into the body, was, by the especial grace and privilege of God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ her Son, the Redeemer of the human race, preserved and made exempt from the stain of original sin. And it is in this sense that they honour and celebrate with solemn rite the festival of her conception." And in a later part of the Constitution the same pontiff says, "Desiring, after the example of the Roman pontiffs

* Th. de Imm. Conc. B.V.M. 3, 4, 5.
† De Festis B.V.M. cap. 185 etc.
‡ Sollicitudo omnium ecclesiarum, 1 and 4.

our predecessors, to favour this piety and devotion, so worthy of praise, as also the festival and that worship which it expresses, and which in the Roman Church has never been changed since that festival was instituted; and moreover to protect that piety and devotion which honours and celebrates the most blessed Virgin as preserved by the preventing grace of the Holy Ghost from original sin; wishing also to preserve in the flock of Christ the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, to appease contentions and strifes, and to remove scandals; at the instance and entreaties of the aforesaid bishops with their chapters, and of King Philip and his kingdoms, we renew the constitutions and decrees of the Roman pontiffs our predecessors, and especially of Sixtus IV, Paul V and Gregory XV, published in favour of the sentence which affirms that the soul of the blessed Virgin at its creation and infusion into the body was endowed with the grace of the Holy Ghost and preserved from original sin; as also in favour of the festival and of the honour paid to the Conception of the same Virgin Mother of God, according to that pious sense above stated; and, under the censures and penalties contained in those same constitutions, we command them to be observed."

It is not the intention of Alexander VII, in this decree, to define the doctrine, but to explain the true sense of the Immaculate Conception as an object of devotion. And understood in this its true sense we at once perceive that the conception of the Blessed Virgin was beyond all comparison more noble and exalted than that of John the Baptist, or of any other saint, whilst it is immeasurably beneath that of her divine Son. For if the conception of St Elizabeth was

miraculous, so also, according to tradition, was that of St Ann; but the soul of the Baptist was not preserved immaculate at its union with the body, but was sanctified through the presence of Jesus at the Visitation. And our divine Lord was conceived only of the Holy Ghost, in the virginal womb, so that His active and passive conception were identical, and both most holy and divine.

[It may be well to observe that the expressions "The Immaculate Conception," "The Immaculate preservation," "The Immunity and Exemption from Original sin," are all phrases which bear the same signification, and are used equally to express one and the same mystery.]

CHAPTER VII

The Eternal Counsel of God

THE Almighty One has said, "My thoughts are not as your thoughts, nor My ways as your ways; but as far as the heavens are removed from the earth, so far are My thoughts above your thoughts, and My ways above your ways."* He reaches from end to end, and His knowledge is from eternity unto eternity, and all things are open and manifest before Him. A thousand years are but as a day in His sight, and before the beginning He sees what, even in the liberty of His creature, is accomplished in the end. For from His unchangeable eternity our God, in His most simple and perfect intuition, beholds all past, all present, and all future things in a present manner; His indivisible eternity is equally related to every instant which dawns in the succession of time. In His eternal Word He beholds all things and decrees all creations, but the counsel of His eternal wisdom is not ordained according to those laws which direct the successions of time. These are laws for the creature and not for their Creator. His wisdom contemplates the end of His work, and ordains the means unto their ends, and subordinates the intermediate ends unto the final end, and the final end stands first in His eternal counsel; and the end of that eternal counsel, from which creation springs, is the glorification of His eternal Son through the mystery of the Incarna-

* Isa. lv, 8, 9.

tion. Hence Christ is "the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end."* Hence He says, "Sacrifice and oblation Thou wouldest not; but a body Thou hast fitted to me: holocausts for sin did not please Thee. Then said I: Behold I come: in the head of the book it is written of Me: that I should do Thy will O God."† Hence St Peter says, "The precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without spot, foreknown indeed before the constitution of the world, but manifested in the last times."‡ And hence St Paul says, "We have redemption through His blood . . . . who is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature. For in Him were all things created in heaven, and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominations, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and in Him: and He is before all, and by Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the Church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead: that in all things He may hold the primacy."§ And hence, also, in the Apocalypse, Christ is called, "the beginning of the creation of God."‖

First, then, and at the head of the book of the eternal counsel, stands decreed the Incarnation of the Son of God. By that decree shall He, in the fulness of time, be "made of a woman,"¶ that is of a particular and predestinated woman; "and shall become a child," ** that is, He shall become the child of Mary. And thus Mary stands next to Jesus in the divine decree as the chosen medium of the Incarnation. Of all the elect, St Paul has said, "He chose us in Christ before the constitution of the world, that we

* Apoc xxii, 13. † Heb. x. 5, 6, 7. ‡ 1 Pet. i, 19, 20.
§ Coloss. i. 14–18. ‖ Apoc. iii. 14. ¶ Gal. iv, 4.
** Cf. Isa. ix, 6.

should be holy and blameless in His sight in charity. Who predestined us to the adoption of children through Jesus Christ, unto Himself, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise and glory of his grace, by which he hath graced us in His beloved Son." * And, if thus He chose His adopted children in Christ ere the world was constituted, first and before them all He chose and decreed the existence and the graces of that Mother through whom the Son should come to bring this grace. She is THE WOMAN, proclaimed at the fall as destined to crush the head of Satan. † She is THE VIRGIN, who shall conceive and bring forth a Son, made known to Isaias. ‡ She is "the new thing upon the earth, A WOMAN shall encompass man," who is made known to Jeremias. § And a series of illustrious women, instruments in God's hands for the delivery of His people, foreshadow her coming. Such are Judith, Debora and Esther. Such also, in a more special sense, is the one true and immaculate spouse of the true Wisdom, whom the Holy Ghost celebrates in the Canticle of Solomon. Such also, though more imperfectly, were those women who miraculously brought forth sons that were figures of Christ.

To the prophet Jeremias God said, "Before I formed thee in the bowels of thy mother, I knew thee; and before thou camest forth from the womb I sanctified thee, and made thee a prophet unto the nations." ‖ To Mary, therefore, far more could He say: "Before I created thee I knew thee, and gave thee for a Mother unto My Son."

Since Mary then is included in the decree of

* Eph. i, 4, 5, 6. † Gen. iii, 15. ‡ Isa. vii, 14.
§ Jer. xxxi, 22. ‖ Jer. i, 5.

the Incarnation as the means for its accomplishment; and since in the decree, as it concerns her, must be of course included those gifts of nature and of grace which adorn and prepare her for a maternity so sacred, she stands forth next to her divine Son, and as the second of creatures in the counsel of God.

From eternity, then, does God contemplate Jesus as the Son of Mary, and Mary as the Mother of Jesus; His Son as the head of man, and Mary as the head of woman.

It is to illustrate this doctrine that in her offices for the festivals of the Blessed Virgin the Church employs those passages in the Sapiential books which speak literally of the Son of God, the eternal Wisdom, and of the decree of His Incarnation, and applies them in the spirit of accommodation to the Mother of our Lord. She contemplates Mary as the chosen one, in whose person God has everlastingly contemplated the bringing about of the human conception of His Son.

Thus, from the eighth chapter of Proverbs, which, as Petavius shows, the majority of the Fathers interpret of the Incarnation,* we say of Mary by accommodation, as of Jesus literally: "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His ways, before He made anything from the beginning. . . . The depths were not as yet, and I was already conceived." †

Aretas, Archbishop of Cæsarea, interprets the following passage from Isaias lxvi, 7, of the Mother of the Lord: "Before she was in labour, she brought forth; before her time came to be delivered, she brought forth a man child." ‡

* Petavius de Trinitate ii, 1. † Prov. viii, 22, 24.
‡ Aretas, Com. in Apoc. xxxiii.

If the saints then are elected in Jesus before the world was constituted, Mary is pre-elected in Jesus. If the saints are chosen for His glory, Mary is chosen as the way by which He came to purchase that glory. If these graces are predestined to them, the graces of Mary are more wonderfully predestined that she may bring the Author of grace into the world. And God contemplates, from the depths of His eternity, that Son who is born into the world for the redemption of His creatures, and that Mother of whose virgin purity He is conceived of the Holy Ghost. And thus before the ages, in the contemplation of God, was Mary the predestined Mother of Jesus

CHAPTER VIII

The Fall of the Angels

THE angels had not, at their creation, the beatifying vision of God: that glory was won by them in a state of grace. This implies that their first state was a state of faith and of trial. To quote the famous allusion of St Augustine, "They had the evening light, but not the morning light."* That they had a knowledge through faith of the blessed Trinity is the doctrine of all the divines. And, as St Thomas says, "What the prophets knew of the mysteries of grace through revelation was revealed in a more excellent way to the angels." †

But was the eternal counsel on the mystery of the Incarnation in any manner communicated to them? That they adored the First-begotten at His entering the world we know; ‡ but had they been expecting this event from the first? Taking the whole context of the passage in the first Epistle of St Peter, it seems evident that it was on the mystery of Christ that "the angels longed to look"; § which implies a knowledge begun but not perfected, a knowledge through faith but not through insight of that sacred mystery.

Most certainly, the "primacy" of the God incarnate and His glorious reign over angels as over men are constantly asserted by St Paul; and the victory of the God incarnate over Satan and his sin, as over Adam and his sin, is the most

* De Genesi ad litteram iv, 32.
† Sum. I, q. 57, a. 5 ad 3am.
‡ Heb. i, 6.
§ 1 Pet. i, 12.

exalted end in which their creation resulted. For by that victory, which was the work of eternal wisdom, as the creation was the work of infinite power, not only are the angels who by grace stood firm re-established, and man redeemed, but the greatest of glories, that was possible in created beings, was given to God, and both the angels and saints clothed with the splendour thereof. Hence St Paul says of Christ that "God has appointed Him the heir of all things," * and that "He is the head of principalities and powers," † as well as of men, and that it has well pleased the Father "through Him to reconcile all things unto Himself, making peace through the blood of His cross, both as to the things that are on earth, and the things that are in heaven." ‡ And He made "the angels and powers and virtues subject to Him." § The angels, therefore, were most deeply interested in the Incarnation. And though St Paul seems to say that it was made known to them through the preaching of the Church, yet this cannot refer to their knowledge as derived from the eternal counsel of God, but only to its realization and the fruits it brought forth in time. For the angels administered towards its fulfilment under the Old Testament, and proclaimed it from heaven before it was preached in the Church.

St Ignatius in his Epistle to the Smyrneans intimates that the angels cannot be saved without faith in the blood of Christ. He says, "Let no man deceive himself: both the things which are in heaven, and the glorious angels and princes, whether visible or invisible, if they believe not in the blood of Christ, it is to their

* Heb. i, 2. † Eph. i, 21. ‡ Coloss. i, 20.
§ 1 St Peter, iii, 22.

condemnation."* And St Jerome, commenting on the Ephesians, says that "the Son of God descended to the lowest regions of the earth, and ascended above all the heavens, not only to fulfil the law and the prophets, but also to execute certain hidden dispensations which are known only to Him and to the Father. Nor can we know after what manner the blood of Christ has profited the angels. But yet we cannot be ignorant that it did profit them."†

St Bernard in his famous exposition of the Canticles asks how Christ could be redemption to the angels. And he briefly answers, "He who raised up man from his fall, gave to the angel who stood that he might not fall; thus He rescued man from captivity and protected the angels from captivity. And in that way was He equally a redemption to both, delivering the one and preserving the other. Thus it is plain that Christ the Lord was redemption to the holy angels, as He was their justice and wisdom and sanctification."‡

Supposing, then, that the angels had a knowledge of the Incarnation, and that they read "in the head of the book" § of that wondrous counsel in which they were so deeply concerned, then there follows another question: What was their trial, and by what occasion did Satan fall? It is clear from the sacred scriptures that the beginning of his fall was pride and ambition. But many of the Fathers teach that he completed his perdition through envy of the prerogatives of man.‖ He envied his being made in the image

* Ep. ad Smyrn. vi. † St Jerome, com. in Eph. iv, 10.
‡ Serm. 22, in Cantica. § Ps. xxxix, 8.
‖ For this opinion see Irenæus iii, 23, No. 8; Tertull. de Patientia, 5; St Cyprian, De Zelo et Livore; St Greg. Nys. Catech. 6; St Augustine citing St Cyprian, De Bap. iv, 8;

of God; he envied his dominion over the creation; and, above all, he envied man in the head and prince of men, our Lord Jesus Christ. And thus he accumulated new crimes upon his head.

As the angels are of a nobler creation than man by nature, it is difficult to suppose that Satan envied man except with reference to the Incarnation of the Son of God. But when he saw that man, born of a woman and "made a little lower than the angels,"* was made one with God by personal union with the eternal Son of God, it is easy to comprehend how, full of pride and ambition, he should burst forth in envy, rage and hatred at the revelation of so wonderful a mystery.

Hence great theologians of very different schools, such as Scotus, John of St Thomas, the celebrated Dominican, and Suarez, with other divines, maintain that the object of Satan's envy was the hypostatic union of God with man in Jesus;† that he accounted himself more worthy to be one with God, and to sit at His right hand, than any human creature; that he refused to confess and adore the mystery of humility, and to recognize the Son of God as "made of a woman, made under the law,"‡ and "made a little lower than the angels"§ for the sufferings of death.

Methodius cited by Epiphanius, Hæres. lxiv, 21; and Anastasius the Sinaite. Lactantius says Satan envied the Son of God, Inst. Div. ii. 8. * Ps. viii, 6.

† Scotus, Sent. ii, Disp. v, 9. Scotus gives and approves of this as a possible explanation of Satan's sin. His preferred view is given Dist. vi, q. 2, n. 8, to the effect that it was inordinate love of self that caused his fall. Billuart, de Angelis Disp. v, a. 3, dico 3°, cites John of St Thomas, and calls it the probable opinion of a most eminent divine. Suarez, L. 7 de Angelis, xiii, 13. He cites Vigner, Jacob of Valentia, Catharinus and Lactantius, as absolutely of this opinion, and others as holding it probable. Petavius, who is against it, cites Scribonius as for it. ‡ Gal. iv, 4. § Heb. ii, 7. Ps. viii, 6.

And the conclusion drawn from these premisses is that the mystery revealed to the angels for the trial of their faith was the Incarnation of the Son of God in the womb of the Virgin Mary. And that it is historically set forth as a type of the Church in the twelfth chapter of the Apocalypse.

When our Lord says of the devil that "he was a man-slayer from the beginning, and stood not in the truth,"* He seems to refer to the time of his fall, and to intimate that he was a man-slayer at that same beginning, when he stood not in the truth. This is the interpretation of Abbot Rupert, who concludes that by his sin he assailed the God made man.† The whole of the two first chapters of St Paul to the Hebrews bear strongly on this subject. The apostle asks, "To which of the angels hath God said at any time, Thou art my Son: to-day have I begotten thee? And again, when He bringeth in the first-begotten into the world, He saith: And let all the angels of God adore Him." And again he asks: "To which of the angels said He at any time, Sit thou on My right hand, until I make thy enemies thy footstool?"‡ And he shows that God would not subject the world to come unto the angels, but in Jesus He raised up man from a condition lower than the angels, and put all things under his feet, and through His death "destroyed the empire of death, that is to say, the devil"; for "nowhere doth He take hold of the angels; but of the seed of Abraham He taketh hold."§ The whole of these two chapters comes out with a vast increase of depth and intelligence, if we read them under the supposition

* John viii, 44. † Com. in Evang. Joan. c. v.
‡ Heb. i, 5, 6, 13. § Heb. ii, 14, 16.

that angels actually aspired to that seat which Jesus holds.

The Sacred Scriptures give us three most terrible descriptions of the fall of Satan, and in each instance that fall is made a type of the fall of some great earthly power which has arisen under Satan's inspiration. In each of the descriptions the type is constantly mingled with the antitype, and we see Satan blended with his earthly instrument. Thus in the fourteenth chapter of Isaias the fall of Satan is made the type of the fall of the king of Babylon: "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, who didst rise in the morning? How art thou fallen to the earth, that didst wound the nations? And thou saidst in thy heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God, I will sit in the mountain of the covenant, in the sides of the north. I will ascend above the height of the clouds, I will be like to the Most High. But yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, into the depth of the pit."* This description indicates an ambition to be placed at the head of the creation, that is, in the place of Jesus, rather than in that of the eternal Father.

In the twenty-eighth chapter of Ezechiel Satan is described as the type of the fall of the king of Tyre; and the pride of Satan is more fully brought out than his ambition in the picture, "Thou wast the seal of resemblance, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. Thou wast in the pleasure of the paradise of God: every precious stone was thy covering. . . . Thou wast a cherub stretching out thy wings, and covering, and I set thee in the holy mountain of God, thou hast walked in the midst of the stones of fire. Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day of thy creation, until iniquity was found in thee. . . . And I cast

thee out from the mountain of God, and destroyed thee, O covering cherub, out of the midst of the stones of fire. And thy heart was lifted up with thy beauty; and thou hast lost thy wisdom in thy beauty; I have cast thee to the ground."†

For brevity's sake I have omitted those parts in the two descriptions which literally apply to one or other of the kings. But the most remarkable description of Satan's overthrow is that which is depicted in the twelfth chapter of the Apocalypse. Here the fall of Satan is the type of the fall of Antichrist, and the first and the last great apostasies are brought together. In this sublime and terrible vision Satan is revealed to us as the first Antichrist and as the inspirer and mover of the second. And the combat in heaven is put forth as the type of the final battle on earth. Amidst that wondrous commotion in heaven, where Michael and his angels are arrayed against Satan and his angels, the blessed Mother of God stands radiant in divine light with the Son of God incarnate in her womb. She is the central figure about which those great events take their rise. Satan wars against her and seeks to devour her Son. Her Son is born, and sits on the throne of God, and Satan is cast out from heaven to continue his war upon the earth. In this description, while Satan is the figure of Antichrist, the Blessed Virgin is the figure of the Church, for as Mary bore Christ, so the Church bears Christ in the bringing forth of His members. And as Antichrist wages war against the Church impelled by Satan, so Satan impels Antichrist to the combat against the Church as the continuance of his own war against Jesus and

* Isa. xiv, 12–15. † Ezec. xxviii, 12–17.

against "the woman." We shall therefore find in this, as in all applications of types and figures, a constant mingling of two senses, the one literal the other figurative, the one historical the other prophetical, the one looking to the past, the other towards the future. The combat of the Church with Antichrist is the object of the prophecy, but the combat of the angels with Satan and his host is the historical type under which it is described, whilst Mary bringing forth the Son of God is the historical type of the Church. But the historical time is taken back to the moment of the fall of the angels, and the place is the heavens, whilst the prophetic time looks towards the earth, the Church militant and the days of Antichrist. Hence the two traditions and the two interpretations, the one representing the "woman" as the Blessed Virgin, the other as the Church. For parts of the vision literally describe the Blessed Virgin and her Child, whilst other parts literally describe the Church and her children; parts again literally describe Satan, his combat and his fall, whilst parts literally describe Antichrist, his combat and his fall. The description properly commences with the last verse of the eleventh chapter.*

"And the temple of God was opened in heaven; and the ark of His testament was seen in His temple, and there were lightnings and voices, and an earthquake, and great hail."

St John begins with what we may call the composition of place. He carries us to the holy of holies, to the highest heaven. Jesus is the testament, and Mary the ark of the testament.

* See Cornelius à Lapide, who expands the whole vision in the sense here given, with ample citation of authorities.

She is thus designated by the Fathers,* as in her litany she is called the ark of the covenant. St John Damascene calls her the animated ark of the living God.† The lightnings, earthquakes and voices are the tokens of God's power and irresistible Will.

"And a great sign appeared in heaven."‡ What sign is this? Isaias says, "The Lord Himself shall give you a sign. Behold a Virgin shall conceive and bring forth a Son."§ And this Virgin is the sign which St John beholds, but he beholds her confronted to Satan, in the very hour of his perdition. For who is this sign? "A woman clothed with the sun, and the moon beneath her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. And she, being with child, cried travailing in birth, and was in pain to be delivered."‖

The woman, so resplendent in her glory, is and can be but the blessed Mother of God, for her Child is no sooner born than He sits on the throne of God. But the cries and pains are those of the Church, who is in labour with her children.¶

"And there appeared another sign in heaven: and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven and cast them on the earth; and the dragon stood before the woman, who was

* Vid. Passaglia, de Immac. Concep. sec. 3, c. 2, art. 2, who cites ten Fathers.

† Hom. ii in Nat. B.V.M. 7. ‡ Apoc. xii, 1.

§ Isa. vii, 14. ‖ Apoc. xii, 1, 2.

¶ "This woman," says Kendrick, "is most correctly conceived to be the blessed Virgin, since she is spoken of as the mother of the child whom the dragon sought to destroy." And he quotes Moses Stuart, a Protestant, as not altogether objecting to it, though startled at the magnificence of the description. (Com. on Apoc. ad h. l.)

ready to be delivered, that when she should be delivered he might devour her Son. And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule the nations with an iron rod; and her Son was taken up to the throne of God."*

The iron rod for the ruling of the nations is the attribute of Christ in the second psalm and in the second chapter of the Apocalypse. Only God can sit upon the throne of God. This allusion to the divinity of the child born of the "woman" is aimed at the prevailing heresy of the Cerinthians and Ebionites.

"And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she had a place prepared by God, that there they should feed her a thousand two hundred and sixty days."†

Satan inspired Herod to seek the death of the Child, and Mary saved Him by her flight into Egypt, and the Church is dispersed, and her children take flight to the deserts in the great persecution.

"And there was a great battle in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon, and the dragon fought and his angels; and they prevailed not, neither was their place found any more in heaven. And that great red dragon was cast out, the old serpent, who is called the devil, and Satan, who seduceth the whole world, and he was cast forth unto the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him."‡

This, as De Sacy remarks, is a literal description of the fall of Satan and his angels.§ For he fell from heaven but once, and then was overthrown, as Rupert observes, not by the angels, but by the power of that most holy birth.‖ Hence

* Apoc. xii, 3, 4, 5. † Apoc. xii, 6. ‡ Apoc. xii, 7, 8, 9.
§ Com. in Apoc. xii, 7. ‖ Com. in Joel ii.

in the seventy-third psalm this victory is sung: "God is our King before all ages; He hath wrought salvation in the midst of the earth. . . . Thou hast broken the heads of the dragon."* The angels who stood faithful stood with the Son of God, and fought with Him by His strength and with their faith. Their great leader's cry was, Michael! that is, "Who is like to God?" And it became his glorious designation. And Satan, whose name means "the adversary," became the designation of his enemy.

Then the angels burst out into the song of victory, and proclaimed that divine power by whose grace they have won their victory.

"And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying: Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ: because the accuser of our brethren is cast forth, who accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony, and they loved not their lives unto death."†

Here Satan's tempting of the angels, and his trying of men, are blended in one common description; and the heavenly and the earthly victory are equally ascribed to the power of the Son of God, and to the testimony which is given unto Christ. The trial of the angels is over, and they pass to their reward.

The remainder of the vision is of the earthly conflict. But at the close, in a brief word, St John resumes both the earthly and the heavenly combat, for in both doth Satan stand confronted in his enmity against the Mother of our Lord.

"And the dragon was angry with the woman,

* Ps. lxxiii, 12, 14. † Apoc. xii, 10, 11.

and went to make war with the rest of her seed."*

But the rest of her seed are the members of her Son, who are the true children of Abraham, all "heirs indeed of God and joint-heirs with Christ."† And here there comes out into clear expression that enmity between the Mother of God and Satan, which began in heaven, where her office was first revealed, and has ever since been continued on earth.

The sin of Satan then began in gigantic pride, went on to ambition, and brought on his final destruction through his envy and hatred of the Son of God, incarnate of the Virgin Mary. Hence his deadly hatred of that meek and holy Mother, who is the created cause from which his woes have sprung. She is the predestined one, through whom his conqueror shall always foil his schemes, confounding the strong one by the weakness of woman. For his destruction is the work of wisdom, not of power, and wisdom works its ends through the weakest of instruments. Hence, no sooner had Satan seduced Eve than God declared to Him, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman . . . . and she shall crush thy head"*—as in fact she had always crushed his head, for Mary, through Jesus, crushed the heads of the dragon, as Hesychius, the priest of Jerusalem, observes.‡ "She who was incorrupt and immaculate in body and soul crushed the head of the most perfidious," observes St Ephrem.‖

St Epiphanius refers to this vision when he exclaims: "O most holy Virgin, who didst cast the armies of angels into astonishment; for it

* Apoc. xii, 17. † Rom. viii, 17. ‡ Gen. iii, 15.
§ Hom. ii de S. M. Deipara, Bib. Max. Pat. xii, p. 187.
‖ Orat. ad S. Dei Matrem, tom. iii, Gr. et Lat. p. 547.

is an astounding miracle in the heavens, the woman clothed with the sun; it is an astounding miracle in the heavens, the woman bearing the light in her arms; it is an astounding miracle in the heavens, that other cherubic throne; it is an astounding miracle in the heavens, the Son of the woman, who is both her father and the father of ages; it is an astounding miracle in the heavens, the bridal chamber of the Virgin, having within the Son of God—God the spouse Christ; it is an astounding miracle in the heavens, the Lord of Angels become the child of a Virgin."*

In the fourth of the four sermons on the Creed, amongst the works of St Augustine, which, if it be not of that Father, is of his time and appeals to the popular belief, the sense of the vision which we have been contemplating is summed up in the following words: "In the Apocalypse of St John this is written, that the dragon stood in the sight of the woman who was about to be delivered, that when she had been delivered he might devour her Son. No one of you is ignorant that that dragon was the devil, and that that woman signified the Virgin Mary, who, in her integrity, brought forth our head in His integrity, and who shows forth in herself a figure of the holy Church; for as she brought forth her Son and remained a virgin, so the Church brings forth at all times her members, whilst she loses not virginity."†

But St Augustine is undoubtedly the author of a like interpretation, in his commentary on the 142nd Psalm, where he says: "Let your charity attend, not to what you are ignorant of but

* S. Epiph. de Laudibus B.V.M.
† Serm. iv de Symbolo ad Cat. 1.

to what you know; that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is the head of His body, is that one mediator of God and men, the man Jesus, born of the Virgin, as if in solitude, as we have heard in the Apocalypse. By this solitude I think is meant that He alone was so born. For that woman brought Him forth to rule the people with a rod of iron. But this woman is that ancient city of God."* Thus St Augustine considered the "Woman" to be both the Blessed Virgin and the Church.

As early as the third century, St Methodius spoke of a then existing opinion that the "woman" was the Blessed Virgin. He himself decides that she is the Church. He did not see that both interpretations might be true, though he proves by his testimony that both existed.†

Andrew, Archbishop of Cæsarea, in his commentary on the Apocalypse, has this passage on the words, "Mulier amicta sole": "Some interpret this woman to be the all-holy Virgin Mother of God, and think that she encountered all that here follows in order, before her divine parturition could be perfectly known."‡

St Ambrose, in his book on the Institution of Virginity, makes this profound and beautiful observation: "As Mary was delivered to the care of John, the virginal Evangelist, it is not to be wondered at that he should utter divine mysteries more than the rest, for he had near him the state chamber of the heavenly mysteries." And he exclaims in a later chapter: "How beautiful are those things also which are prophesied of Mary in the figure of the Church!"§

* In Ps. cxlii, 2.
† Convivium Virginum, Orat. 8, Bib. Max. Pat. iii, p. 692.
‡ Com. in Apoc. c. 33, Bib. Max. Pat. v, p. 609.
§ De Inst. Virg. vii and xiv.

It was indeed fit consolation for John, when Mary was with him no more, and he himself was in exile, to behold her again in the heavens, a type of the Church, and to record this portion of her mysteries.

Primasius, Bishop of Adrumetum, who was a disciple of St Augustine, and assisted at the fifth General Council, says in his commentary, citing the words, "The Child was taken up to God and to His throne":* "But if you would interpret this especially of the person of Christ, except the pains which we do not believe the Blessed Virgin had in child-bearing, as we know she contracted no sin from concupiscence in conception, you may easily adapt the rest."†

Ambrose Ansbertus, the Benedictine commentator of the eighth century, says: "As the genus often appears in the species, so in this place the blessed and pious Virgin represents the Church, which daily brings forth new children, of whom the general body of the Mediator is formed. Nor need we wonder that she should be the type of the Church, in whose blessed womb the Church deserved to be united with its head. But there are some things in what follows that do not literally apply to the Blessed Virgin, but to the elect of the Church."

Aretas, Bishop of Cæsarea in the tenth century, says in his commentary: "Some say this 'woman' is the Mother of the Lord, and the sun with which she is clothed is the intellectual sun, Christ; and that the moon beneath her feet is the synagogue of the Jews, which can no longer increase." But, that she was pregnant

* Apoc. xii, 5.
† Com. in Apoc. l. 3, Bib. Max. Pat. x, p. 316.
‡ In Apoc. l. 5, Bib. Max. Pat. xiii, p. 530.

and cried out in giving birth, they resolve through Isaias, who says: "Before she was in labour, she brought forth; before her time came to be delivered, she brought forth a man-child."* She was in pain lest her husband should suspect her of adultery, which the Scripture so far affirms in that he "sought to put her away privately."†

St Bernard, speaking of the vision of the "woman," says: "Though the series of prophecies shows that it refers to the Church, yet it is to be attributed without difficulty to the Blessed Virgin."‡

And in the following century Abbot Rupert in his great mystic commentary explains the whole vision in the twofold sense we have given to it.§ Indeed, when we reflect that the vision of the dragon is commonly interpreted as referring to the historical event of the fall of Satan, why should we, and how can we, but interpret the vision of the "woman" and her divine Child, as historical of the predestined Incarnation of Christ from Mary? And so Mary prefigures the Church, the dragon Antichrist.

Two motives have led me to explain this revelation at some length. The glorious form under which the blessed Mother of God appears to St John as the sign in heaven, radiant with grace, and holding the dragon subject beneath her feet, is the symbol under which her Immaculate Conception is always represented to the faithful. This must have an especial meaning, and that meaning we have endeavoured to bring

* Isa. lxvi, 7.
† Matt. i, 19; In Apoc. c. 33, Bib. Max. Pat. ix, p. 769.
‡ Serm. in Dom. infra oct. Assump. 3.
§ Com. in Apoc. l. 7.

out. That representation will now remind us that Mary was pre-ordained before the world to be the Mother of God, and equally pre-ordained to a most beautiful nature and a most resplendent grace; that she was revealed to the angels as the living ark of the living God, and as clothed with the light of the Sun of Justice; that Satan, the old serpent, who is called the devil, raised up beneath her feet the first rebellion and apostasy in heaven against her divine Son and against herself; that eternal enmity and war was then proclaimed by Satan against her, as against her Son; and that, as the most pure and immaculate sign and the chosen organ of the Incarnation of the Son of God, she overthrew that first heresy in heaven, as she has done so many since on earth.

CHAPTER IX

Original Sin and its Effects

BORN alas! in sin, and conceived in iniquity, the effects of that original contamination adhere to us, and leave us not but with our earthly life. Morally one with the head from which we sprang, and of one body with that first prevaricator, no sooner has our disordered flesh obtained existence from its disordered cause, and no sooner has our soul obtained its lodging in that now animated and troubled germ, than it is overwhelmed and brought under the dominion of its sensuous and blind confusion. Void of grace, to which it has no right, and infused into a vessel already defiled, as St Augustine expresses it, the soul contracts defilement therefrom, and becomes the victim of the rebellious commotions of the flesh in which it has taken its abode. And without aid from that divine power by which it alone could resist the deadly venom, the child becomes the prey of Satan even in its mother's womb. Thus, they who give life to our bodies kill our souls. Nor can all the efforts of our after love eradicate the mischief which that death from the beginning brings upon us.

The mother brings forth her blighted child in pain and anguish. Its first accents are cries and weepings, for it is a child of wrath, and the voice of God exclaims upon it, "What is born of flesh is flesh. . . . You must be born again."*

* John iii, 6, 7.

Yes, the divine life is extinct in that little creature, made for union with God. It breathes but a sensuous and an animal life. Its faculties are dreadfully enfeebled; ignorance reigns in the intellect; the will is gathered upon that little *self* as on its centre; and sense reigns through all its powers. It is shut up within the bounds of fallen nature as the snail within its slimy shell. No angel is its companion, no saint is its patron. Jesus is not with such a child as yet: it is shut out from God —"What is born of flesh is flesh. . . . You must be born again."* By that blessed baptism comes that blessed birth. The waters of life flow in upon the soul, Satan is expelled, and within it Jesus seals with His eternal light a living image of Himself. That infant is thenceforth a Christian, bears the Christian name, is a child of eternal life. Yet how deep are the scars left by that primal wound! The grace of Christ holds possession of the soul, but the body is still unregenerate as before. It bears the penalties of its origin in every mortal sense and vein and nerve and fibre. It agitates the soul with its passions, it sways her about with its fickleness, it blinds her with its lusts, it torments her with its petulance, it worries her with its incessant wants and cravings, it urges her to all manner of selfishness and pride; it is a prey to its own sensibilities and ever-varying moods, and is scourged by a thousand diseases. And thus that man whom God designed to be spiritual in the flesh, is ever inclining to be carnal in his mind. And if he lend his mind to his inclinations, that mind itself deserts his soul, goes over to the domestic enemy, is drawn into its seductions, becomes its terrible ally, and the soul once

* John iii, 6, 7.

more becomes the enchained and blindfold victim of the flesh. And the Apostle says of such an one, "The carnal man cannot see the things which are of the Spirit of God."*

But let us return to the regenerate and just soul. We have seen and, alas! we have all experienced, in what a frail and unsafe vessel even the just man carries his treasure. The worm of corruption is in his members, the venom of the serpent infects them; and however it may smoulder under the ashes of our clay, the fuel of concupiscence is there, and ever ready to burst into lurid flame as occasion breathes upon it. There is only one security, and that is with a most humble heart to mistrust our nature, and vigorously by the Spirit to mortify and bring it into subjection, and to wait with patience for the day when Christ shall reform our earthly bodies and make them like unto His own most glorious body.

Who of men has the grace and illumination of St Paul? And yet listen to the description which he draws of himself: "I know that there dwelleth not in me, that is to say, in my flesh, that which is good. For to will is present with me, but to accomplish that which is good I find not. For the good which I will, I do not, but the evil which I will not, that I do. . . . I find then a law, that when I have a will to do good, evil is present with me. For I am delighted with the law of God, according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind, and captivating me in the law of sin that is in my members. Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? The grace of God by

* 1 Cor. ii, 14.

Jesus Christ our Lord. Therefore I myself with the mind serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin."*

Such, then, were the effects of original sin, which, after so long and sharp a combat, remained in that most holy servant of God, that vessel of election, St Paul. Can the faith of Jesus permit us to regard His own blessed Mother in such a light, even for a moment? Did the Holy Ghost commingle His spirit with such a flesh? Did Jesus take flesh from a being like this?

How mysterious is the law of this transmission from our origin! How unsearchable! Yet how plain a proof that we are not made now as God first made us! Were some spirit of another sphere to hear for the first time that in this planet, on which his gaze was fixed, dwelt beings made to God's image who multiplied their kind; struck with the gift of so sublime a power, would he not conclude that the exercise of a privilege so like unto creation must be the most exalted hour in the existence of those beings? Alas for the fall! We can only close our lips in silence, and then exclaim, "What is born of flesh is flesh.† For, behold I was conceived in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me."‡

But this is not the conception from which that blessed one should be formed who shall give her flesh unto the Son of God. Grace may remove the sin, and blot out the culpability, as day removes the darkness of the night; but as, when the night is gone, it leaves effects behind—the cold, the fogs, the frosts, and the keen blasts, so, after original sin has departed, there remain de-

* Rom. vii, 18–25. † John iii, 6. ‡ Ps. l, 7.

bilities, habits, depraved emotions, penalties, and, above all, that irreparable loss of original innocence which, like lost virginity, can never be restored. However atoned for, that dishonour rests on the soul like the stain on the escutcheon, which no after deeds can succeed in erasing. And what is that stain but that the supernatural image of God had been blotted out; but that the soul had been beforetimes disinherited of life; but that she had been hated of God; but that, in the language of scripture, she had been "a vessel of wrath, fitted for destruction"?*

And if our faith will not allow that the blessed Mary ever contracted actual sin, though but venial, though but the dust which touches the beauty of the soul without wounding deeply, still less destroying, its charity; if, as St Thomas says, "She would not have been a suitable Mother of God if she had sinned at any time, because, as in Proverbs it is written, 'the glory of the children are their parents,'† consequently the ignominy of the mother is reflected on the son";‡ if, then, neither our faith nor our piety will allow that those motes and specks of sin fell ever on the face of Mary, though quickly brushed away, how can we suppose that she had been entirely covered and penetrated with sin of another kind, as with a pestilential leprosy?

To sum up the nature of this sin in the words of the council of Trent, "Original sin, which in its origin is one, and is transfused by propagation, not by imitation, is in all and belongs to each one," but is so in each of all who contract it that they are immediately "defiled, lose their innocence, are made by nature children of wrath,

* Rom. ix, 22. † Prov. xvii, 6.
‡ iii, q. 27, a. 4 in corp.

become the servants of sin, and are brought under the power of the devil."*

Let us now raise up our minds towards that infinite purity of God. Let us invoke His blessed light, that it may purify our vision and give the clear truth unto our sight. The most pure spirit flies from sin, and will not dwell in a soul that is subject to sin. Let us contemplate now the eternal decree of the Incarnation, the holiest and purest of created mysteries. Let us consider that decree which follows so close upon it, and is bound up with it: that decree which provides a Mother for the eternal Son of God. Let us consider that if, as St Paul says, Christ took "the likeness of sinful flesh,"† it was yet without sin, and that, by an infinite distance, He was "separated from sinners."‡ And then can we say that the God who had the power had not the will to make His Mother sinless and immaculate? When we consider that Jesus and Mary for nine months were one flesh, can we say this? When we consider that for thirty years the will of Mary was the law of Jesus, can we say it? When we consider the compass of God's power, and the height of His great plan, of which that Incarnation wrought in Mary is the most unfathomable mystery; when we consider how in accomplishing this deepest of mysteries God surrounds it with exceptions which rise above all nature's laws; when we consider that spirit of preparation by which God turns nature so often from its course to ripen the hour of its fulfilment; when we consider that the law of gradation and the perfecting of our species need the crowning of perfection in woman as in man, and that

* Sess. v, Dec. de Pec. orig. † Rom. viii, 3.
‡ Heb. vii, 26.

the accumulation of all the possible excellence of which woman is capable must be looked for in a Mother of God, if there can be such a person, and that Mary actually is that person; when we consider, once more, the infinite holiness of Jesus and His filial consanguinity with Mary, what other conclusion is open to us than that He who could make His Mother immaculate did not abandon her to His enemy, but in the view of His own merits did make her most pure, and full of grace, and immaculate? Above all, when we consider that the Eternal Word did, in the splendour of the Most Holy, mirror forth to the contemplation of the Father and of the Holy Ghost, and of Himself, and that from eternity, the express form and image of His predestined Mother, can we say that He contemplated her as defiled, as unclean, as a child of wrath, as the servant of sin, as brought under the power of the devil?

But after a moment of sin she is cleansed and sanctified, say certain objectors. But if we grant to sin and to the devil but that one moment, we give up everything, and abandon her stainless honour. She comes to God from the hands of Satan, and gives to Jesus what once was Satan's but for a moment! With God the first moments are supreme moments. Lucifer fell from God in a moment, and with but a thought. And of what moment was that moment! For sin is measured not by time, but by depth of defilement. And better is it to be an exile from God for eternity than to be the sinner of that moment. Would not Mary have preferred to have been neither the Virgin, nor the blessed one, nor the Mother of God, nor the Queen of angels and saints, than to have been for that moment grace-

less, stripped of innocence, hateful to God, and defiled with sin? On that one moment are all those treasures staked which alone are most dear and precious to the Virgin Mother of God. Say anything else of Mary, but do not say that she was ever accursed. This only could grieve her beyond all, that she had ever been corrupted and defiled.

But Christ alone is born without man's intervention. Mary is a child of Adam, and by nature a child of wrath. Where, then, shall a refuge be found her from the deluge of sin? Where but in the arms of her divine Son? Where but in His infinite power to save and redeem? Where but in the inexhaustible treasury of His grace? The law of transmission is accomplished ere the soul has joined the body. And the cause of original sin, which comes with the body, is not a necessitating cause, for it remains in that body still, after that baptism has repelled it from the soul. It is that previous absence of grace from the soul which leaves her a prey to the corrupting flesh. But let the soul of Mary be full of grace, when her union with the body is accomplished, and she is not only preserved, but all laws are satisfied. And He who in the face of the universal law gave sanctity to the soul of John the Baptist before he was born, could give sanctity to the soul of Mary at the moment of its conception.

But in that case was Mary a child of redemption? Did her Son die for her salvation? Was she the offspring of His glorious blood? Most surely she was redeemed by His blood. Her redemption was the very masterpiece of His redeeming wisdom. It presents one instance more, the very noblest, of that law of accumulation of

excellence, as the one absolutely perfect work of redemption. For, to enter upon the celebrated argument of Scotus, our Lord is the universal Redeemer and most perfect Mediator. Must we not, then, look for some most complete and exquisite example of His mediatorial and redeeming powers—an example of such surpassing excellence that a greater cannot be imagined? And if He has not wrought that absolutely perfect redemption in His blessed Mother, of whom alone it is predicated, has He yet put forth in any case His full powers of redemption?

He who prevents the disease is the greater physician than he who cures it after it has been contracted. He is the greater redeemer who pays the debt that it may not be incurred than he who pays it after it has fallen on the debtor. It is a greater good to save us from sin that we may not sin, than to save us from sin after we have sinned. It is a more blessed mediation to prevent us lest we should offend the majesty of God than to appease His anger after we have offended. That very ancient and famous book on Divine Names which bears the name of St Denis the Areopagite lays down a formal division of the two kinds of redemption, and says that this is the distinction of theologians—the one preserving from evil and nothingness; the other repairing what is deteriorated by sin and error.* And so St Bernard says of the angels who stood, that Christ saved them by His grace, that they might not fall, and was in that way their Redeemer.†

And if our Lord exercised a greater power of redemption over Mary than over others, by preserving her from actual sin, He exercised His

* viii, 9. † Serm. 22 in Cant. 6.

greatest power by preserving her from original sin. And if, as our Lord said to Simon, more love is owing where more has been forgiven,* Mary was bound in more love to Jesus, as she had received from His hands that greatest of forgivenesses in the greatest of redemptions. When David said to God, "Thou hast redeemed me from the malignant sword," † the sword of Goliath had not struck the prophet king, but it had threatened him, and God had preserved him from its stroke.

But if Jesus saved His Mother so completely from sin that she never felt its power, it was not His blessed will to exempt her from the temporal penalties of Adam. She bore her sorrows as He bore His. She died as He also died. These were not the fruits of sin in the Mother, as they were not in the Son; they were the occasions of her virtues and the sources of her merits. It is the likeness of her divine Son which we must everywhere expect to find in her. And strange, indeed, would it have been if, sharing more largely than others in His graces and His innocence, she had not also shared more largely in His sufferings. Let no one, then, account those sufferings for much which God may send him for his sins and for his security, when he reflects that the innocent Jesus was the Man of sorrows, and the innocent Mary the Mother of dolours.

* Luke vii, 40. † Ps. cxliii, 10.

CHAPTER X

The Fall of Man

WHEN we recall the paradise which God planted and His wisdom beautified as a palace for man's reception; of serenest climate, of exquisite harmony with that order which reigned in the new-created man, its possessor; its verdure and variety of every good tree, and flower, and fruit; its noble streams and fountains, and the mystic tree of life in the midst; the tribes of beasts, strong without terrors, or swift and graceful without fears; the birds in their feathered beauty, and none rapacious amongst them; the fishes sparkling through the waters, but all in peace with one another, and even the subtle serpents wreathing their lithe forms in the playful light, undegraded as yet, and free from venom—when we contemplate that glorious Eden, reflection of God's own beauty in the sweetest light of His wisdom, and our father, Adam, walking free in his domain, and our innocent mother by his side, both free in grace and free in their command of the creation; and God's divine love more warm, more pure, more radiant than the light, reposing within their hearts, and stirring their souls to adoration of their Creator; do we not heave our breasts in sighs, and are not our eyes moistened with sorrow that our mother should have listened to that seducer until the voice of God's love was heard no more? And when we turn from her to the world she

blighted, painted over though it be with countless fascinations and seductions, and look beneath the surface on that long array of loathsome and revolting crimes, that conflict in nature, that rebellion in man, those countless shapes of death and disease, all issuing from the touch of that forbidden fruit; either grace is not in us, or our heads must bow down under the shame, our hearts shrink beneath the woe which our father, too facile to the fallen Eve, has brought upon us.

But as grace begins to stir within our sinking hearts, we lift up our eyes once more, as new life from a better Father dawns upon us, and we see a better Mother is by His side. But what do we behold? instead of paradise, a barren mountain-top, strewn with skulls and bones, and planted there another tree, leafless and lifeless, but hanging on its arms the Father of our life, nailed, torn with the scourge, and ignominiously dying. And beside the new Adam stands the new Eve, erect in innocence, but transfixed with the sword of grief. Must we not, then, cry out with the Church, "O happy fault of Adam, which has deserved so great and blessed a Redeemer"?*

We saw the fall in heaven, and Satan raging with envy against our nature, which the Son of God had raised to union with Himself in the predestined womb of Mary, that it might sit by the eternal throne. He is cast out upon the earth, and comes raging with his infernal malice against mankind. But it is not Jesus and Mary, it is Adam and Eve, that he finds by the tree of forbidden knowledge. Yet no sooner have they lost their innocence and grace, no sooner have

* Exultet, in off. Sab. Sanc.

they felt their shame and covered up their misery with the frail leaves, than Jesus is there, and Mary also. "For they heard the VOICE of the Lord God walking in paradise at the afternoon air."* That voice was the eternal Word of the Father. And the voice of God said to the serpent, "I will put enmities between thee and THE WOMAN, and between thy seed and HER seed; SHE shall crush thy head, and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel."† Terrible rebuke! as if God had said: Weak as is her nature, thou hast not conquered woman. There is one predestined of whom Eve is but the likeness, and in her and her seed thou hast no part. If thou knowest aught of her, yet shalt thou know in time to come far more. Thou shalt wage deadly strife, thou and thy children, against her and her Child, but thou shalt never prevail against her. In seducing her likeness thou hast thought to triumph over Me; but, mystery of weakness and of lowliness as she is, through My power she shall crush thy head.

The mystery of redemption is the masterpiece of the divine wisdom. The very things by which Satan wrought the fall, God employs to discomfit him, and to bring about the reparation, foiling him ever with his own weapons. And so the Church sings, "Such was the order God appointed in the work of our salvation, countermining the schemes of Satan with deeper schemes, and drawing the remedy from the source whence came the wound."‡ So He took the flesh of Adam and the likeness of his sin, that He might destroy sin in His flesh. So He marked the tree of ignominy, that He might produce from it the

* Gen. iii, 8. † Gen. iii, 15.
‡ Hymn, "Pange lingua gloriosi Lauream certaminis."

fruit of glory. So He took up death in Himself that He might dissolve the work of death. And so He took a second Eve, that in her He might dissolve the work of the primal Eve; and that as the first was vanquished by Satan, in the second He might vanquish Satan. And hence, in the Canticle, the Holy Ghost says to the spouse: "Under the apple-tree I raised thee up, there thy mother was corrupted; there she was defiled that bore thee."*

Mary resembles Eve, then, in all that concerned her innocence, whilst she is the contrast of Eve in all that concerned her sin, and the Fathers of the Church have rivalled each other in drawing out this resemblance and this contrast. They compare the original innocence and purity of Mary with the original innocence and purity of Eve. They show that Adam was formed of the earth, whilst it was yet virginal and immaculate, before God had rained on it, or man had broken it, or compressed it with labour; and that before human blood had flowed upon it, or crime had defiled it, and before it had been opened for the burial of man, God formed our parent from its chaste and all-pure soil. I have put together the words of many Fathers in this short sentence. They then show that Christ was not formed from an origin less pure, less virginal, less immaculate, or less free from the curse, when He was formed from the Virgin Mary.

St Andrew, the Apostle, to whose words we shall refer later, says that, "As Adam was formed from immaculate earth, therefore it was necessary that the perfect man should be formed of an immaculate Virgin."† We heard St Irenæus, the depositary of the traditions of St John,

* viii, 5. † Ex act. dub. S., et apud Surium, p. 697.

speaking the same language in a former chapter. He draws the comparison between Adam, formed by the hand of God, of that pure and virginal soil, and the eternal Word reforming Adam in Himself from the virginal Mary. He then asks why God did not take earth again to form Jesus, and replies that it became Him to be formed from that which He came to save, that He might have its likeness.* Tertullian uses the same language, and applies to Mary the words of the Psalmist, "The earth shall give its benedictions."† The same idea is put forth by a host of the Fathers. They compare Mary also with paradise before sin was known there. They point out how Adam was formed of that earth alone, and Christ of Mary alone, and that, as the earth at the time was unaccursed, so Mary was unaccursed; that there germinated in her neither the thorns of original nor the briars of actual sin. "She was an earth," says St John Damascene, "not cursed like the former earth, whose fruits were bristling with thorns and briars, but on whom was the blessing of the Lord."‡ "She was a lily amongst thorns," says Theodotus of Ancyra; "she was ignorant of the miseries of Eve."§ "She was not infected by the poisonous blasts of the serpent," says a writer amongst the works of Origen. And the Eastern Church chaunts in her ritual hymns, "O admirable flower, who, from that Eden out of which death was diffused into the universe, didst breathe the odour of immortality into the children of Eve."‖ George of Nicomedia says that through Mary

* S. Iren. Hæres. iii, 21, n. 10.
† Ps. lxvi, 7. De Carne Christi, 17; and contra Judæos, 13.
‡ 2 Serm. in Nativ. B. M. V., n. 4.
§ Orat. in S. Dei Genitricem, n. 11.
‖ Eulog. in officio elevationis panis.

"the image of God, that had been vitiated in us, returned to its beauty, and through her we throw off the clothing of skins which were made for sin, and put on the robe of light."*

She is compared with the tree of life, as contrasted with that tree from which Eve plucked the fruit of corruption. And the eastern Church but resumes the traditional preaching of her Fathers when she sings: "Thou art made for us the new paradise, wherein the tree of life is planted, by eating of which they are restored to new life who through eating fell, O innocent Mother of God."†

The wife of Adam had not conceived her first-born child, and was a mother in no other than a prophetic sense; and they had but heard the consoling word from God, that the woman's seed should crush the head of their destroyer, when Adam called her by the name of "Eve, because she was the mother of all the living."‡ Now of the children of Eve the first-born slew the second, envious that he had done what was pleasing to God, and after a terrible life came himself to a terrible death. How, then, could Adam call Eve the mother of the living, who became the mother of the dead, unless in figure, and in hope of a better mother to come? He looked to that true Eve, the Woman, and the mother, who should bring forth life, and crush the serpent's head. And St Peter Chrysologus thus compares this second with the first Eve: "She now is truly the mother of the living through grace, who stood forth the mother of the dying through nature."§

* Orat. in Deip. Præsent., or. iv versus finem.
† Menolog. die 8 April.
‡ Gen. iii, 20.
§ Serm. 140 de Annunciat. B. V.

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But much deeper is the contrast between the souls of the two mothers of mankind. And the Fathers point out how Eve lost all things for us by the free action and choice of her will, and how Mary gained all things for us by the free choice and submission of her will. Hence they set the faith of Mary against the infidelity of Eve, and the obedience of Mary against the rebellion of Eve and the innocence and immaculate purity of Mary against the thorough-going sin and defilement of Eve; and thence they show how completely the interior disposition and spirit of the one were the means through which came the remedy that healed the miseries occasioned by the other. Gabriel explained Mary's only difficulties, and God waited for the consent of her will before He accomplished the Incarnation of His Son. Upon her will, at that moment, the coming of our salvation depended. It is this free co-operation of Mary which explains so much of the language of the Fathers concerning her. Let us again listen to St Irenæus, for he is a very early and a great authority. He says:

"As Eve became, by her disobedience, the cause of death to herself and the entire human race, so Mary, who, though a virgin, had yet a predestined husband, was by her obedience made the cause of salvation to herself and the entire human race. . . . Thus the knot of Eve's disobedience was untied through Mary's obedience. For what the virgin Eve tied fast by unbelief, that the virgin Mary untied by faith."* And Tertullian says: "The serpent seduced Eve; Mary listened and consented to Gabriel. But the seduction of Eve brought death, the consent of Mary brought forth a Saviour to the world.

* III, xxii, 4.

That was restored through Mary which, through Eve, had perished."* St Epiphanius says that Eve foreshadowed Mary, "who received that she should be figuratively called the mother of the living. For the former was called the mother of the living even after her prevarication, when she heard that word, 'Dust thou art and into dust thou shalt return.'† This was certainly to be wondered at that after her prevarication she should obtain so great an addition to her name. But if we consider what lies beneath our senses, the whole of our earthly race is derived from that first Eve. But from Mary truly and indeed was life itself brought into the world, so that she both brought forth life and became the mother of them who have life."‡

No sooner, then, does our first mother fall than our second mother appears. Satan seduces Eve, and God upholds the woman before him, who shall resist him to his overthrow. In paradise the Almighty proclaims a lasting enmity between these two. Satan may lie in wait for the new Eve, but God has set her foot upon his head, and threatens him with fear of her and of her seed. But if she is to be his prey, why should Satan fear her? If enmity is already placed between them by the eternal decree, which resounded through the trees of paradise, if that decree resounded for all future time, "I will will place enmity between thee and THE WOMAN,"§ could they ever be friends? could Mary ever be his subject and his slave? If in the perpetual conflict between her and the enemy of man she is to crush his head, not only through her divine offspring, but also by her own enmity against

* Tertul. de Carne Christi, 17. † Gen. iii, 19.
‡ S. Epiph. Hæres. lxxviii, 18. § Gen. iii, 15.

him, how can this be explained except by an origin as well as by a life in which the devil had no part? The new Adam can yield in nothing that is good and pure to the old Adam; and therefore, if the father of the human race is formed of the immaculate, so the Redeemer of the human race is formed of the immaculate. Eve came from the side of sinless Adam, and Jesus fromthe womb of sinless Mary. He would not have His predestined Mother of a less holy beginning than the mother of Cain.

Let us devoutly, then, address to her the words of the holy patriarch of Constantinople, St Germanus:

"Hail, most pleasant and rational paradise of God, who to-day art planted by the right hand of the Almighty in the east of His delights, where thou presentest unto Him the flowering lily and the unfading rose! To us who in the west of death drink in the pestilential bitterness so pernicious to our souls, thou art the paradise where flourishes the tree of life, whose fruit whoever tastes, gains immortality.* . . . This alone dost thou allege: 'How can this be, for I know not man?'† But in as far as thou dost surpass the heavenly ones in glory and the earthly ones in modesty, so far greater art thou than this implies. For, beyond all that can be said or thought of, thy mind, pure as it is, and free from stain, is closed to any approach of the least vestige or shadow of inordinate or less worthy emotion. Thou art the earthly paradise which God planted, and out of which He gave command unto the cherubim that those laws thou

* Orat. I in Deip. Præsent. Edita a Maraccio. Cf. Passaglia I, 472.

† Luke i, 34.

didst receive from nature they should cultivate to sanctity; and that in a circle round about thee they should wield the fiery sword, and should protect thee from the snares of the deceitful serpent. 'The Holy Ghost shall descend in thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee.'* When Eve conversed in paradise, the tortuous spirit, with his many wiles, insinuated himself into her conversation under the winding folds of the serpent; but in thee the most holy and upright Spirit descended. For, as it is sung in the Canticles, indeed 'the upright love thee.'"†

* Luke i, 35.

† Orat. I in Deip. Annunciat. Edita a Maraccio pp. 108, 109. Cf. Passaglia I, 472.

CHAPTER XI

Joachim and Anna

A CELEBRATED divine* has made the remark that, though some persons wonder that the Evangelists are silent on the parents of the Blessed Virgin, and have left tradition to record what we know respecting them, yet was this arranged with an especial design by the providence of God. For the Holy Spirit would not fix our attention upon her as descended of parents of whom she would, in nature's course, have received the transmission of original sin; but He would concentrate our attention upon her as the Mother of God, lest, by too vivid an idea of her human parentage, we might be led away from the thought of her election as the Mother of God, which did so greatly profit her that, in the matter of contracting original sin, her birth of human parents was of less weight than the fact of her destination to that divine maternity.

Yet the early Christians were piously curious as to the natural origin of the blessed Mary. There was evidently a disposition to regard that origin as having been in some way supernatural. The question occupied the heretics as well as the orthodox. The apocryphal books go to extravagant lengths in their history of her parents, Joachim and Anna. The Collyridians supposed

* Orat. I in Deip. Annunciat. Edita a Maraccio, pp. 108, 109. Cf. Passaglia I, 472.

her to have been born of a virgin, and offered her a species of divine worship, which was at once condemned,* whilst the Manicheans, if we are to believe St Thomas† and Capponi,‡ believed her to be an angel incarnate. Each heresy strove to exalt her in its own way, whilst each fell far below her true dignity and the actual greatness of her origin.

SS. Joachim and Anna are extolled as the parents of the blessed Virgin by St Hippolytus the martyr,§ by St Epiphanius,‖ St Germanus of Constantinople,¶ Nicephorus,** St Andrew of Crete,†† George of Nicomedia,‡‡ St John Damascene,§§ and by others of the Fathers. Their festival was celebrated at an early period both in the eastern and the western Church.

Hippolytus the Theban says that in the reign of Cleopatra and Cosoparis, and before the reign of Herod, the son of Antipater, there were three sisters of Bethlehem, daughters of Mathan and Mary. The first was called Mary, the second Sobe, and the third Anna. Mary married in Bethlehem, and was the mother of Salome; Sobe also married in Bethlehem, and was the mother of Elizabeth; Anna, the third sister, was married in Galilee, and brought forth Mary the Mother of God, of whom Christ was

* Cf. S. Epiph. Hær. 79.

† St Thom. l. 2 Sent. d. 4, q. 2, a. 1.

‡ Capponi in 3 p., q. 29, app. ad art. ii.

§ Apud Niceph. l. i. c. 7.

‖ Epiph. Hæres. 78.

¶ German. de Oblat. Mariæ. Encomium in S. Deip. quando triennis præsentata est in templo. Bib. Max. Pat. xiii, 62.

** Niceph. Hist. l. i. c. 7.

†† And. Cret. in B. M. diem Nat. or 1 B. Max. Pat. x, 620.

‡‡ Geo. Nicomed. Orat. 4 in S. Deip. representationem in templo.

§§ S J. Damasc. l. iv. De Fide Orthodoxa, et Orat. de Nativ. B. M. c. 14. Also Or. i in Nat. B. V. M. § 7.

born to us.* This would explain the origin of those who, after the Jewish custom, are called the brethren of the Lord, though but relatives in a more distant degree; and we are not required to suppose that St Anna had any other children besides the blessed Virgin.

That great presages should have preceded the human conception of the blessed Virgin we must be prepared to expect, when we reflect on those which preceded so many of the saints of the Old Testament. For who can think so unworthily of God as to suppose that He would do greater things for His servants than for His Mother, for the friends of the spouse than for the spouse? Nearly all the Fathers last cited describe Joachim and Anna as advanced in age, and childless, and past all hope of children, and that whilst they were apart, and each in prayer, Joachim on a mountain in the desert (says St Epiphanius, professedly quoting traditions), and Anna in her garden, an angel announced to them the conception of Mary.† St John Damascene asks why the blessed Virgin should be born of a sterile mother? Clearly, he replies, for this reason, "that He who alone was new beneath the sun, and the head of prodigies, might open the way for Himself through prodigies, and that the order of things might ascend from the lowest to the highest by degrees."‡ As Rupert observes, all those in the Scriptures who were born of

* Hyp. Theb. Frag. ex syntagmate Chron. Galland. xiv. 107.

† On all this subject see the Apparatus of Mansi and Georgi to the Annals of Baronius, and Mazzola, de B. M. Virgine. St Epiphanius, Hæres. 79, adv. Coll. 5, de Laudibus B. V. M., St Germanus, l. c. p. 63, and St John Damascene, de Fid. orthodoxa iv, 14, speak of the apparition of the angel.

‡ S. J. Damasc. Hom. 1 in Nativ. B. V., n. 2.

sterile mothers were great personages, who present most admirable similitudes in the course of their lives and actions. And as St John Damascene again observes, "Anna who brought forth the Mother of God was not to yield to any of those mothers who had been made illustrious."*

St Epiphanius says: "Her parents were Joachim and Anna, who in their lives pleased God, and germinated that fruit, the holy Virgin Mary, at once the temple and the Mother of God. And these three, Joachim, Anna and Mary, offered openly a sacrifice of praise to the Trinity. But Joachim is interpreted 'the preparation of the Lord,' because from him was prepared the Lord's temple, that is the Virgin. Anna, again, is interpreted 'grace,' because Joachim and Anna received grace that after their continual prayers they might germinate such fruit as they received in the holy Virgin—for Joachim prayed on the mountain, and Anna in her garden. But Anna having conceived, brought forth that heavenly and cherubic throne, the holy child Mary."† Hence the Church says in the collect on the feast of St Anna: "O God, who didst confer the grace on blessed Anna, that she might be worthy to become the mother of her who brought forth Thy Son, etc."‡

When Mary had reached the age of three years, her parents presented her in the temple, where, like the child Samuel, she abode for eleven years, after which she was delivered by the priests to the care of Joseph.§

* S. J. Damasc. l. iv. de Fid., c. 14.

† S. Epiph. de Laudibus, B. V. M. ad init. ‡ Die 26 Julii.

§ Niceph. citing Evodius, patriarch of Antioch, l. ii. 3; S. Greg. Nyss. de Christi Natal.; S. J. Damasc. de Fid. Orth. c. 14; S. German., Constant. Encomium, etc., ut supra; S. And. Cret. Orat. in diem Nat. B. V. M. 5.

If then the first, or active, conception of Mary was not immaculate, it was at least miraculous; and the organization of that body which was to receive a soul so very beautiful, so very pure and full of grace, was not left to the common course of nature, but was brought about by the divine intervention. But it is not of this conception of St Anna, admirable and miraculous as it is, that we speak when we contemplate the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God, but it is of that divine conception which we are about to consider in the following chapter.

There is, however, an objection floating in the atmosphere of our country which must here be brought to examination. If it be supposed necessary that our Lord's Mother should be of immaculate origin, why, it is asked, are not St Anna, and all her ancestors, included in a like exemption from the common misery? This objection could only arise from a sensuous apprehension of a most spiritual mystery. It is closely allied with Calvin's doctrine that the just propagate the just. There is forgetfulness of the fact that the body is not regenerate until the resurrection, or there is a notion latent that souls are transmitted as well as bodies. St Augustine met that difficulty when he said, "You wonder how a sinner can be born of a just man; but you do not consider that the wild olive springs from the garden olive tree; nor do you take note that the straw springs with the wheat, though not planted with it. And the cause that the just man cannot be the author of the just is this, that he generates not from the source whence he receives regeneration, but from the source whence he was generated."*

* Serm. in Verb. Apostoli, c. 16.

Mary is immaculate from God's grace through her soul, and not from her parents through the body. Our Lord takes not flesh from Anna, but from Mary. She alone is the Mother of God, and therefore is she alone exempted from the general law and preserved immaculate.

CHAPTER XII

The Moment of the Immaculate Conception

THE morning star is about to rise upon the night which overspreads the fallen world with its deep shadows. The East already warms, and the glorious Sun of Justice sends His rays before His coming. That beautiful star precedes Him on His way. It is full of His light, and is the reflection of His purity. O Lucifer, no longer art thou "the bringer of the light," but the prince and ruler of the darkness. And now thy kingdom is invaded by the dawning day, and Mary is the bringer of the light. The instant is come for that elected creature to appear who, of a daughter of Eve, is made the Mother of God.

Chosen in the counsels of eternity; associated with the Son of God from the beginning of the sacred plan; revealed to the angels together with her Incarnate Son; assailed by the proud and aspiring Lucifer from envy and for her lowliness, because of Him who lifts up the lowly; revered by the angelic hosts as their queen, and the animated temple of their Lord; proclaimed to our first parents as the antagonist of their destroyer, and as destined with her Son to crush the serpent's head; contemplated and preached by the prophets as "THE WOMAN" and "THE VIRGIN" who was to bring into the world its long-desired deliverer; prefigured by the noblest women of Israel; renowned in the tradition of the gentiles through their sibyls and

sung by their poets; daughter of Abraham, of Juda, and of David—of a lineage which God had upheld and protected for more ages than the Christian Church yet numbers, and so illustrious only because it is destined to terminate in her; closing the Old Testament and opening the New; the repairer of woman and the Mother of salvation to mankind; raised to an office, to a dignity, and an alliance with her God which, next to her divine Son, makes her one and unapproachable in excellence; above the angels, yea, above the seraphs, for which of them can say to God, "Thou art my Son"?*—this Mother of God is about to pass from God's eternal counsel to created life.

The Father contemplates the forming of the fairest of His daughters; the Son considers the graces which are suited to His Mother; the Holy Ghost prepares to sanctify the chosen spouse whom His Spirit shall search and His power overshadow.

It was on the sixth day, and after He had prepared the world for the residence of man, that out of the deep counsels of His most blessed Trinity the Almighty spoke the final word of creation, "Let us make man."† He formed Adam from the innocent earth; He drew Eve from his innocent side; He graced them with pure and holy souls.

For four thousand years have their descendants multiplied in sin, sprung from the disobedience of that guilty pair, till they have covered the earth with a terrible history. And to each germ that buds from that bitter root, by virtue of His primal gift and promise, God owes an immortal soul. But no sooner does a soul come to animate the new offshoot from that old stock of

* Ps. ii, 7. † Gen. i, 26.

Adam than it is overmastered by the contamination which flows for ever onwards from its corrupted source.

But a bud is springing from the root of Jesse, and the poison of the serpent shall not infect it, nor shall his foul breathings blight its beauty. The adorable Trinity is about to pronounce the creative word—"Let the Mother of God be made."

To her aged parents, past all hope of offspring, an angel comes; amidst their devotions he proclaims them the chosen organs of her miraculous beginning, and the fleshly frame, which shall give flesh to the living God, commences its existence. A soul bright as the morning star, and full of holiest grace, is breathed by God into that tender and exquisite frame, and the secret fire that lingered there, at the very entrnce of that free and holy soul, is quenched, and the flesh brought into subjection and order. And thus, from the first instant of her animated existence, the Mother of God is most pure, most holy and most immaculate; and she offers immaculate praise to her Creator and Redeemer, Jesus, who had so often anticipated His work for the sanctification of His elect, made one great anticipation more for the sake of His own incarnation. He drew the most costly of the gems of grace from the inexhaustible treasury of His cross, and wrought the most perfect of redemptions in the immaculate conception of His Mother. And, since the human race began, in this chosen one alone did God see a soul escape from His creative hands that was neither caught in the cords of Adam nor ensnared in the bonds of death. So from the ark our father Noah sent forth the raven from his hands, but it joined the

floating putrefaction, and nourished thereby a degraded life; whilst the dove returned into his bosom and brought him in its innocent beak the olive branch of peace,

To the true dove, His one true spouse, the Holy Spirit sings that canticle through the choirs of the Church which He rehearsed to the bride of Solomon: "One is my dove, my perfect one is but one, the only one of her mother, the chosen of her that bore her.*

"Thou art all fair, O my love, and there is not a spot in thee.†

"As the lily amongst thorns, so is my love amongst the daughters. ‡

"Under the apple-tree I raised thee up, there was thy mother corrupted: there was she defiled who bore thee. §

"My spouse is as an enclosed garden, and a sealed fountain. ‖

"Put me as a seal upon thy heart, and a seal upon thy arm; for love is strong as death: jealousy is hard as hell, the lamps thereof are fire and flames. Many waters cannot quench charity, neither can the floods drown it." ¶

Clearly the spouse of Solomon is but a figure; and the Holy Ghost describes another spouse, who is one, who is immaculate, who is the spouse of the eternal Wisdom, and the mother of the King of our salvation. And if the Church sings also of herself in this inspired canticle, of all her members, she sings first of her fairest and firstborn. Of all the redeemed within her gates, she sings first of the holiest and the most perfectly redeemed. The Church knows well of whom she sings when she chants this inspired

* Cant. vi, 8. † Cant. iv, 7. ‡ Cant. ii, 2.
§ Cant. viii, 5. ‖ Cant. iv, 12. ¶ Cant. viii, 6, 7.

description in the sacred offices of Mary. Of all her sons and daughters she sings first and most of her who, like the Church, is the Mother of all the living. Of her the Scripture sings, who is the "fairest among women, and comely as Jerusalem, and who is terrible to Satan as an army set in array." *

* Cant. i, 7; vi, 3.

CHAPTER XIII

The Voice of the Fathers

As no controversy had ever arisen with reference to the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God before the age of St Bernard, we cannot expect to find a scientific statement on the subject in the Fathers. Yet on careful investigation the whole mind of the oriental Church is found to have been imbued with the doctrine from the earliest times. And when in the western Church the great controversy with the Pelagians led to a thorough sifting of the subject of original sin, it drew from St Augustine, the great doctor of grace, those remarkable declarations which exempt the blessed Virgin from all sin.* In examining the testimonies of the Fathers, it becomes undeniable that whilst many of them speak in the sense of the Immaculate Conception, not a single one of their number has positively said that Mary had ever contracted original sin, whilst at the same time the ambiguous language, which has been so carefully collected and cited by the opponents of the mystery, from a certain number of them, resolves itself into perfect accordance with the doctrine of her

* De natura et gratia, 36. Those who would see the tradition drawn out in all its copiousness, must take in hand the extensive work of Passaglia, which has just issued from the Roman press, but of which I have only had a glance at the first volume. It is entitled, *De Immaculato Deiparæ Semper Virginis Conceptu Commentarius*, and comprises three volumes in folio. In this chapter I am much indebted to the beautiful treatise of Abbot Guéranger.—[Note to the first edition.]

exemption from sin, the moment that doctrine is rightly apprehended and distinguished from what does not come under its definition.

The first testimony is that which the Apostle St Andrew has left us in his profession of faith before the Proconsul Egeus, as recorded in the celebrated letter of the priests of Patras which relates his martyrdom. The apostle says: "The first man brought in death through the tree of prevarication, hence it was necessary, that as death had been brought in, it should through the tree of the passion, be driven out. And because the first man was created of immaculate earth, it was necessary that the perfect man should be born of an immaculate Virgin, through whose means the Son of God, who had before created man, might repair that eternal life which had been lost through Adam."*

The celebrated comparison between the immaculate earth and the immaculate Virgin became, as we have seen, a common expression with the fathers.

St Dionysius, patriarch of Alexandria, and one of the most famous doctors of the third century, thus speaks of the relations between the Mother of God and her divine Son: "There are many mothers; but one and one only Virgin daughter of life, who brought forth the living Word, who exists of Himself, uncreated and Creator."†

Again, of that divine power which formed

* Martyrium S. Andreæ, ap., cap. v. ap. Gallandi, I, p. 156. The authenticity of this letter is asserted by Lumper, Gallandi, Morcelli, &c. And the Protestant Woog, who first published the Greek, has vindicated it against its assailants. Gallandi observes that it was used very early in the Offices of the Church. Dom Ceillier thinks it doubtful.

† Epist. advers. Paulum Samosat. in corpore ante resp.

Mary for her destination, the same saint says: —"Christ dwelt not in a servant, but 'in His holy tabernacle, not made with hands,'* Mary, the Mother of God. In her our King, the King of glory was made high Priest and abideth for ever."† Before this the same holy bishop says: "Neither was our supreme High Priest ordained by the hands of man, nor was His tabernacle fabricated by men, but that most praiseworthy tabernacle of God, Mary the Virgin, and Mother of God, was firmly set by the Holy Ghost, and protected by the power of the Most High." St Dionysius also compares the Blessed Virgin to the garden of delights: "The only-begotten God, the Word, descended from heaven, and was born in the womb, and came forth from the virginal paradise which possessed all things."‡

The celebrated comparison between Eve, whilst yet immaculate and incorrupt, that is to say, not subject to original sin, and the blessed Virgin is drawn out by St Justin,§ St Irenæus,‖ Tertullian,¶ Julian Firmicus,** St Cyril of Jerusalem,†† and St Epiphanius.‡‡ As St Justin is the first of the series, from his dialogue with Trypho §§ I cite the passage, where, speaking of the divine Word of the Father, he says: "He was made from a Virgin, that the way by which disobedience took its beginning from the serpent by the same it might receive its destruction. For

* Heb. ix, 11.
† Ibid. Respons. ad quæst. 7.
‡ Ibid. Respons. ad quæst. 5 and 10.
§ S. Justin. Dialog. cum Tryphone, n. 100.
‖ S. Iren. cont. Hæres. l. iii. c. 22, n. 4.
¶ Tertull. de Carne Christi. c. 17.
** Jul. Firmic. de errore prophan. relig. c. 26.
†† S. Cyril. Jerusal. Catech. xii, 29.
‡‡ S. Epiph. Hæres. lxxviii, 18.
§§ No. 100.

whilst Eve was yet Virgin and incorrupt, having conceived the words spoken to her by the serpent, she brought forth disobedience and death. But the Virgin Mary, when she had received faith and joy, as Gabriel announced to her the glad message that the Spirit of the Lord should descend in her, and the power of the Most High should overshadow her, . . . gave answer: 'Be it done to me according to Thy word.'"*

In the same spirit, and with a like implied exemption from the curse, St Hippolytus, bishop and martyr, says, speaking first of our Saviour: "He was the ark formed of incorruptible wood. For by this is signified that His tabernacle was exempt from putridity and corruption, 'which brought forth no corruption or sin. . . . But the Lord was exempt from sin, 'of wood not obnoxious to corruption according to man'; that is, of the Virgin and of the Holy Ghost, covered within and without with the pure gold of the Word of God."†

Origen, or the ancient author of the homilies attributed to him, thus speaks of the Mother of God: "This virgin Mother of the only-begotten of God is called Mary, worthy of God, immaculate of the immaculate, one of the one." The author then addresses St Joseph: "Receive her as the heavenly treasure confided to thee, as the riches of the Deity, as most complete sanctity, as perfect justice. . . .She conceives not of the desire of the fathers, who is 'neither deceived by the persuasion of the serpent, nor infected with his poisonous breathings.'" He then says: "Christ needs not a father on earth, for He has

* Luke i, 38.

† Orat. in illud, Dominus pascit me. Bibl. Patrum Gallandi, t. ii, p. 496.

an incorruptible Father in heaven. He needs not a mother in heaven, for He has a chaste and immaculate mother on earth, this most blessed Virgin Mary."

In the fourth century St Ephrem extolled the blessed Virgin in streams of the sweetest and most melodious eloquence. It would require a volume by itself to cite all the beautiful things which he has said of her. In a prayer to the blessed Mother of God he calls her: "Immaculate and uncontaminated, incorrupt and thoroughly chaste, and a virgin most estranged from every soil and stain of sin, the spouse of God, and our Lady, . . .inviolate, integral, and manifestly the chaste and pure Virgin Mother of God, . . . more holy than the seraphim, and beyond comparison more glorious than the rest of the supernal hosts."* Again, St Ephrem calls her: "Immaculate, most immaculate, most pure, the exceedingly new and divine gift, the absolutely immaculate, the divine seat of God, the Lady ever blessed, the price of the redemption of Eve, fountain of grace, the sealed fountain of the Holy Ghost, the most divine temple, the pure seat of God, who crushed the head of the most wicked dragon, who was ever in body as in mind entire and immaculate; . . . the holy tabernacle which the spiritual Beseleel built up."†

Much more might be cited from the writings of the great doctor of the Syrian Church which, like what we have given, is utterly inconsistent with the idea of a sinful and corrupt origin in the Mother of God.

In the same century St Ambrose says,

* In Orat. ad Sanct. Dei Genitricem, et Serm. de Laudibus B.M.V., Vol. II, pp. 575-7.

† Ibid.

addressing our Saviour on these words of the Psalmist, "'I have gone astray like a sheep, seek thou thy servant.'* Seek thou thy sheep, not through servants or mercenaries, but through thyself. Receive me in that flesh which fell in Adam; receive me, not from Sarah, but from Mary; that the virgin from whom thou receivest me, may be incorrupt, a virgin integral, through grace, from every stain of sin."†

We will now come to the fifth century, and first to St Augustine. Refuting Pelagius, who had maintained that a considerable number of persons had lived on earth absolutely without sin, St Augustine, in his book on Nature and Grace, replied that all the just had truly known sin, "except," he says, "the holy Virgin Mary, of whom, for the honour of the Lord, I will have no question whatever where sin is concerned. For whence can we know the measure of grace conferred on her to vanquish sin on every side, on her who deserved to conceive and bring forth Him who, it is evident, had no sin?"‡ St Augustine here speaks professedly of actual sin, but he lays down principles which equally exclude every idea of original sin from Mary, in whom, for the honour of the Lord, he will not hear of sin. And the grace she received was given her to vanquish sin on every side, and therefore on the side of her origin.

In a controversy with Julian, the disciple of Pelagius, St Augustine had to defend the doctrine of original sin, which Julian denied. And a remarkable incident arises in the course of the controversy, as connected with our subject. Julian makes a popular appeal to the pious

* Ps. cxviii, 176. † Serm. 22 in Ps. cxviii.
‡ De Natura et Gratia, c. 36.

belief of the faithful respecting the blessed Virgin, as if St Augustine, by his doctrine of original sin had included Mary in it. And St Augustine had to meet the charge. Julian said, "Jovinian opposed Ambrose, but compared with you, he deserves to be acquitted. He destroyed the virginity of Mary by subjecting her to the common laws of child-bearing, but you transfer Mary to the devil, by subjecting her to the common condition of birth." To this charge St Augustine replies: "We do not transfer Mary to the devil by the condition of her birth, for this reason, that that condition is dissolved by the grace of her new birth."*

This incident shows how St Augustine and those of his time shrunk back from the idea that Mary was ever abandoned to the devil or was a child of sin. And as the sin in question between St Augustine and Julian was original sin, it is clear that St Augustine's intention was to free himself from the charge of having transferred Mary with the rest of mankind to Satan through that sin, and by her new birth, or regeneration, he could not refer to baptism in her case, but the grace of redemption in her passive conception.

In a work entitled "A Treatise on the Five Heresies,"† long attributed to St Augustine, but supposed by the Benedictine editors to have been composed soon after his death, our Lord is introduced as reproaching the Manicheans in these words: "I made the mother of whom I should be born. I prepared and cleansed the way for My journey. She whom thou despisest, O Manichean, is My mother, but she is made by My hand. If I could be defiled when I made

* Opus imperfect. contra Julian. l. 4, c. 122.
† Inter opera spuria S. Augustini contra 5 Hæreses, c. 5.

her, I could be defiled when I was born of her." Here, as in several of the ancients, Mary is spoken of as having had a special creation. Nature was cleansed in her when the flesh was animated.

St Maximin of Turin says: "Truly Mary was a dwelling fit for Christ, not because of her habit of body, but because of original grace." *

St Peter Chrysologus, Archbishop of Ravenna, in one of his celebrated discourses, says: "The angel took not the Virgin from Joseph, but gave her to Christ, to whom she was pledged in the womb, when she was made."†

St Sabas, author of one of the Greek Menologies, says, in the 6th ode for January 18: "Thou, O Virgin Mother of God, dost shed lustre on the universe, through thy progeny, even to its confines. For of thee alone it is evident and notorious that thou wast pure from eternity, as the one who didst possess the Sun of justice." And in the 3rd ode for January 3 the saint says to the blessed Virgin: "In thee, who never wast akin to any culpability, I place all my hope." And in the 5th ode for February 12 he says: "Thou, indeed, O Virgin, didst bring forth in a human body that Word of divine origin which before was incorporeal. For from eternity, because of the splendour of thy integrity, and thy virginal completeness, and because of thy gifts and graces, which kept thee exempt from every defect, manifestly thou wast alone worthy of the honour of so great a birth."

Theodotus of Ancyra, in one of his discourses to the Fathers of the Council of Ephesus on the Holy Mother of God and the Holy Nativity of

* Hom. viii de Natali Domini.
† Serm. 140 de Annunciat. B. M. V.

Christ, has the following beautiful and explicit passage: "In place of the Virgin Eve, who stood forth the minister of death, a Virgin is chosen unto obedience of life, who is most pleasing to God and full of grace: a Virgin comprised within the sex of woman, whilst exempt from woman's iniquity: a Virgin innocent, without spot, void of culpability, uncontaminated, untouched, holy in body and in soul, as a lily springing amongst thorns, untaught the ills of Eve. . . . Nor was there any communion in her of light with darkness, but when not yet born, she was consecrated to God, and when born, as a monument of gratitude, was offered up a sacred foster-child to dwell in the temple and the holy place, a disciple of the law, anointed with the Holy Spirit, clothed with divine grace as with a mantle, wise of soul in things divine, espoused in her heart to God, breathing the splendours of sanctity from her eyes, and tuning canticles to the ears, her tongue of honied sweetness, her lips distilling the honeycomb, beautiful in her steps, more beautiful in her conduct, venerable in her speech, more venerable in her actions, meek in her demeanour, more meek in her movements, good in the sight of men, better far in the sight of God, and to speak in one word, all beautiful as an obedient will, all sweet as a store of unguents."*

St Proclus, in his discourse contained in the acts of that Council, amongst many things of a like nature, says: "As He formed her without any stain of her own, so He proceeded from her contracting no stain." And He introduces the Son of God, addressing His Mother in these words: "I shall not in any way injure My

* Orat. in Sanctam Dei Genetricem. Galland. ix, p. 475.

uncreated majesty, for I shall dwell in a tabernacle which was created by Myself."*

Another author says: "Amongst all the souls of men who are saved, there is, as the elect dove, that one and only one who brought forth Christ, the Virgin Mary, the youthful Mary, who truly excelled the Cherubim and Seraphim in purity."†

I shall conclude the testimonies from the fifth century with the following beautiful passage from the Hymn before Meat of Prudentius. "Hence came the enmity of old between the serpent and man, that inextinguishable feud, that now the viper, prostrate beneath the Woman's feet, lies crushed and trampled on. For the Virgin, who obtained grace to bring forth God, hath charmed away all its poisons; and driven to hide himself in the grass, green as himself, he there, coiled up in his folds, torpidly vomits forth his now harmless venom."‡

For brevity's sake I will pass over the intervening testimonies, but in the eighth century there is a passage in the synodal letter of Theodore, patriarch of Jerusalem, which was unanimously approved in the seventh general Council, and is too remarkable to be omitted. This prelate says: "She is truly the Mother of God, and virgin before and after bearing, and she was created in a condition more sublime and glorious than that of all natures, whether intelligible or sensible."§

Twelve years later the Council of Frankfort, whilst refuting the heresy of Felix of Urgel,

* S. Proclus, Laudatio in S. Dei Genetricem, orat. i, 3, and Orat. vi, 14; Galland. ix, pp. 615, 642.

† From Exposition of the Canticles collected from SS. Greg. Nys., Maximus and Nilus; Galland. vi, p. 696.

‡ Verses 146, 155. Galland. viii, p. 526.

§ Labb. Concil. t. vii, p. 179.

gives expression to the same doctrine under another form. The fathers of this Council, in their synodal letter to the bishops of Spain, have to repel the assertion that Christ is the mere adopted Son of God, and they thus revive the ancient forms of speech regarding the Blessed Virgin: "But we would hear this from you. Adam, the first father of the human race, who was created of earth, which was still virgin, was he created in a free or in a slavish condition? If a slave, how then was he the image of God? If free, why should not Christ, formed of the Virgin, be also free? For of a better earth, of an earth animate and immaculate, was He made man by the operation of the Holy Ghost."†

At the beginning of the same century St Germanus, patriarch of Constantinople, had said that Mary was "truly elect, and superior to all, not by the altitude of lofty structures, but as excelling all in the greatness and purity of sublime virtues, and having no affinity with sin whatever."‡

The holy patriarch says again, in a discourse on the Nativity of the Mother of God: "Her body was so beautiful and flourished in so great a purity that it might receive even the incorporeal and immeasurable majesty of the supereessential nature through one of the three Persons. This is Mary the Mother of God, the common refuge of Christians; the first revocation of the first fall of our first parents; the restitution of the fallen race to its right state." *

* Labb. t. vii, p. 1041.

† Maracci in S. Germani Mariali.

‡ This discourse is attributed by Combefis to St Andrew of Crete, Auct. Bib. i, p. 1325. Malou, SS. Patrum Pietas Mariana, p. 18. The reader will find in this little work an admirable selection of Homilies of the Fathers on the Blessed Virgin.

And St Paschasius Radbert, in his book 'On the perpetual virginity and child-birth of Mary,' whilst denying that the flesh of Mary was a flesh of sin, adduces these remarks in the course of his argument: "It is evident that she, through whom not only the curse of our mother Eve was solved but the blessing given to all, was exempt from all original sin . . . . but it is the honour of exquisite piety, and the glory of virtue, to preach the incorrupt and uncontaminated purity of the most Blessed Virgin, and to declare her free from all contagion of the first origin."

As St John Damascene was the first who in the east drew up a systematic statement of Catholic doctrine, and St Anselm the first who did this in a scientific form in the west, it will be interesting to see what the two founders of theology have said on the subject of the Immaculate Conception. And with these celebrated writers I shall conclude the testimonies from the Fathers, leaving the consideration of St Bernard to a later chapter.

In his first homily on the Nativity of the blessed Mary St John Damascene, giving reasons why she is born of a sterile mother, says: "But I can allege a higher and diviner reason. For nature gave way to grace, and stood trembling, not daring to proceed. Since then it was to be that the Virgin Mother of God was to be born of Anna, nature did not dare to anticipate the germ of grace; but it remained devoid of fruit, whilst grace put forth its fruit."* And in his homily on the departure of the blessed Mary he says of her: "To this paradise the way for the serpent was not open; by the fascination of whose false divinity we are brought down

* Hom. I in B.V. Nat. diem 2.

to the level of beasts. For He, the only-begotten Son of God, whereas He was God, and of the same substance as the Father, formed Himself into man from that Virgin and pure earth."* Again, in his second homily on the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, he thus addresses her: "Hail, bush, miracle, enveloped in fire, thyself inaccessible to sin; for that bush cannot be touched . . . . Hail, incomparable wood, who didst not admit the worm of the corruption of sin."†

It is impossible not to conclude with St Thomas that St Anselm has laid down the principles of the Immaculate Conception. In his treatise on the Virginal Conception, the holy Archbishop of Canterbury expounds the principle on which the doctrine rests in the following words: "It was fitting that the conception of that Man (Christ) should be accomplished from a most pure mother. For it was fitting that that Virgin should be resplendent with such a purity that under God a greater could not be imagined; to whom God the Father disposed to give His one and only Son, whom, as born from His heart and equal to Himself He loved as Himself, in such a manner that He might be by nature one and the same Son in common, of God the Father and of the Virgin; her the Son Himself did choose to make substantially a mother for Himself; and from her the Holy Spirit willed, and was about to accomplish in act, that that should be conceived and born from which He (the Holy Ghost) Himself proceeded."‡ But a purity so great that one more perfect cannot be imagined, can only be

* Hom. II de Dormitione B.V. 2.
† Hom. II in B.V. Nat. diem 7.
‡ De Conceptu Virginali, c. 18.

through exemption from original sin. And St Thomas, commenting on this passage, draws the same conclusion in these words: "Purity is understood by the absence of what is contrary to it, and therefore a creature may be found than which nothing can be more pure in created things, if it be defiled by no contagion of sin; and such was the purity of the Blessed Virgin, who was exempt from original and actual sin. But she was beneath God, inasmuch as there was in her the power to commit sin." *

St Anselm adds indeed, "But how that same Virgin was cleansed through faith, before that conception, I have already said." And he here refers to what he had said in a previous work, entitled "Why God is made Man." In this treatise St Anselm says that "the Blessed Virgin was one of those who were cleansed from sin before His (Christ's) nativity." †

During so long and fervid a discussion, lasting as it has done for centuries, the whole of the Fathers have been gleaned over and over again by the antagonists of the mystery, in search of whatever passages might seem to make against the glorious privilege of the Mother of God. The result of these researches has been brought together by Petavius.‡ It amounts to some thirty passages from the whole collection of the Fathers. Some affirm that God alone, or that Christ alone is without sin, without making any allusion to original sin. In others it is said, in general terms, that the whole human race is infected with original sin, whilst no direct allusion is made to the Blessed Virgin. A third class of passages

* In 1 Sentent. d. 44, q. 1, a. 3 ad 3am.
† Cur Deus homo, 2, c. 16.
‡ De Incarnatione xiv, 2.

asserts that all men, if we except Christ alone, are infected by original sin. And when we have separated such testimonies as speak but in these general terms—terms in which even the most strenuous assertors of the exemption of the Blessed Virgin habitually speak, when they speak of mankind in general—we have only a very few passages from a few Fathers left, which either speak of the flesh of the Blessed Virgin as a "flesh of sin," or speak of her as "sanctified," or as "cleansed," or as "purified." St Augustine and certain Fathers of his school speak of the flesh of Mary as a flesh of sin. But they mean no more than that her flesh was derived from the common origin. And the flesh abstracted from the soul neither has personality nor is the subject of sin, as St Anselm and St Thomas have taught, and is of itself neither capable of justice nor of injustice. St Anselm says, "Original sin can only be in a rational nature."* And St Thomas says, "Original sin can by no means be in the flesh, as in its subject, but only in the soul."† Those Fathers, therefore, speak of the flesh of Mary as being conceived in the common way, and of that concupiscence which is both the daughter and the mother of sin, as St Augustine‡ says; but in the Blessed Virgin this was cleansed, purified and sanctified by grace. What was the real opinion of St Augustine on the subject we have already seen. And St Peter Damian has expressed himself with even greater clearness. For, besides other passages in which he has expressed the same idea with greater fulness, in his sermon on the Assumption, he says, "The flesh

* De Conceptu Virginali et Pec. Orig. c. 3.
† In 1-2, q. 83, a. 1.
‡ De Nuptiis et Concupiscentia, i, 24.

of the Virgin which was taken from Adam did not admit the stains of Adam."

There are Fathers who call even the flesh of our Lord a "flesh of sin," by reason of its descent from them who were sinners. St Proclus, in his sixth discourse,* calls the body of our Lord a "body of sin." And St Hilary, in his work on the Trinity, says of Christ: "He received a flesh of sin, that by taking our flesh He might forgive our sins; whilst He was made partaker of it by assuming it, and not by criminality."† And St Gregory Nazianzen has dared to say that the Word "took condemned flesh."‡ But who will assert that these Fathers intended to insinuate that Christ was conceived in original sin?

This, then, is the conclusion we are brought to. There is an unbroken chain of Fathers for the Immaculate Conception, and there are none who deny the mystery in that sense in which the Church explains and understands it. But as it had never been up to this period a subject of controversy, it had not been couched in any doctrinal formulary.

* Or. VI Laudatio Dei Genitricis, n. 17.
† De Trinitate l. 1, n. 13.
‡ Orat. 51, n 18.

CHAPTER XIV

Mahomet and Martin Luther on the Immaculate Conception

THE leaders of the two greatest revolts against the Church of God, strange to say, have received and reflected, each in his peculiar way, the tradition of the Church on the Immaculate Conception.

It is well known that Mahomet, during the commercial period of his life, conversed with Christians on their doctrines, especially in his visit to the great fair of Bosra, which brought people together from all parts of the East. In various parts of his Koran he has inserted fragments of Christian teaching, coloured with his own fancies. And amongst the Christian traditions which he thus caught hold of was that of the Immaculate Conception. The passage, however, owing to the rhapsodical character of its style, is not very intelligible to ordinary readers, without the aid of explanation. And that explanation Mahommedan commentators will supply to us. The passage is contained in the third chapter of the Koran, which is entitled, "The Family of Imram." Imram, or Amram, according to the commentators, is the husband of Anna and the father of Mary: it is another name for St Joachim. In this chapter it is said: "God hath surely chosen Adam, and Noah, and the family of Abraham, and the family of Imram, above the rest of the world; a race descending the one from the other; God is He

who heareth and knoweth. Remember, when the wife of Imram (Anna) said, Lord, I have vowed unto Thee that which is in my womb, to to be dedicated* to thy service; accept it therefore of me, for Thou art He who heareth and knoweth. And when she was delivered of it, she said, Lord, verily I have brought forth a female, (and God well knew what she had brought forth) and a male is not as a female;† I have called her Mary, and I commend her to thy protection, and also her issue, against Satan driven away with stones.‡ Therefore, the Lord accepted her with a gracious acceptance, and caused her to bear an excellent offspring."

I have cited the passage from Sale's translation. Marracci, in his Latin version, which Sale highly commends for its accuracy and closeness to the Arabic, renders the chief portion of the passage after this manner: "And I indeed have called her Mary: and I assuredly commend the care of her to Thee, and her offspring, to be defended from Satan struck with stones. The Lord therefore received her with a beautiful reception, and caused her to germinate with a beautiful germ."

I need scarcely remind the reader that the Koran was written in the seventh century. Gelali, or Gelaleddin Mahalli, explaining the passage after Mahommedan traditions, in the

* The original word is *free,* which signifies here, as Gelali says, one free from worldly occupations and desires, and devoted to God.

† That is, a female cannot minister in the temple as a male could.

‡ *Driven away with stones.* This expression alludes to a tradition that when the devil tempted Abraham to disobey God, and not to sacrifice his son, Abraham drove him off with stones. In memory of which the pilgrims to Mecca cast stones at the devil in the valley of Mina.

fifteenth century, says: "In the histories it is said, no one is born but Satan touches him at his birth, and therefore he bursts into weeping, except Mary and her Son."* Hossein Vaes, a century later, repeats the exposition in his Persian commentary.† Cotada confirms the Mahommedan opinion in these words: "Every one born of Adam is pierced in the side by the touch of Satan when born, except Jesus and His Mother; for God put a veil between them and Satan, so that the touch of Satan was arrested in the veil, nor did it touch them in any part. Moreover, it is narrated to us that neither of them committed any sin, as the other children of Adam do."‡

Sale, in his note on Mahomet's text, says: "It is not improbable that the pretended Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary is intimated in this passage."

This tradition is the more remarkable as the Mahommetans teach from their Koran that God made a compact with Adam and all his descendants at his creation.§

The Koran goes on to say that Mary, under the care of Zacharia, was placed in a chamber of the temple. It then narrates the miraculous birth of St John the Baptist, whom he calls an honourable, chaste and righteous prophet, who should bear witness to the Word from God. It then adds: "The angels said, O Mary, Verily God hath chosen thee, and hath purified thee, and hath chosen thee above all the women of the world: O Mary, be devout towards thy

* Maracci, Alcorani Refutatio, in locum.
† D'Herbelot, Bibliothèque Orient. art. *Miriam.*
‡ Maracci, ibid.
§ D'Herbelot, art. *Adam.*

Lord, and worship and bow down with those that bow down."

The respect which Mahomet and his followers have always expressed towards the Blessed Virgin, and which should put many to shame who profess themselves Christians, is the more remarkable when we consider their notions respecting the rest of her sex, opinions as disgraceful as they are degrading, and tending to show that theoretical opinions concerning Mary are of no avail, unless in those Christian hearts which separate her not from Jesus, and truly honour her as the Mother of God. An anecdote is told by d'Herbelot, from the "Defter Lethaif," which illustrates the Mahommedan opinion concerning Mary.

Abou Ishac, one of the most famous doctors of Mahommedanism, was ambassador from the Caliph, at the court of the Greek emperor. There he had warm disputes on the subject of religion with the Greek patriarch and several bishops. The bishops had quoted sundry reflections made by Mahommedans to the disadvantage of Ayesha, the wife and widow of the false prophet. Abou Ishac replied by drawing a picture of the divisions in the East respecting our Lord's Incarnation; how some said that the holy Virgin brought forth, some said she did not bring forth, some said they knew not whether she did or not. He then concluded with this appeal to the bishops: "How can you be surprised that Mahommedans have differed about Ayesha, since Christians have differed about that glorious Virgin Mary, who was a mine and a fountain of purity?"

Let us now turn to Martin Luther.

In a sermon on the Gospel from the eleventh

chapter of St Luke, "Blessed is the womb that bore thee" . . . . preached on the day of the Conception of the Blessed Virgin, Luther has put forth the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception in so clear and solid a way that one may almost forgive him the fling at the religious orders with which he opens his discourse. After speaking on original sin and of the birth of Christ from the Blessed Virgin, he says:

"But as the Virgin Mary was herself born of a father and mother in the natural way, many have been disposed to assert that she was also born in original sin, though all with one mouth affirm that she was sanctified in the maternal womb, and conceived without concupiscence. But some have been disposed to take a middle way, and have said that man's conception is twofold: that the one is from the parents, but that the other takes place when the little body is prepared, and the soul infused by God, its Creator. Of the first conception we shall say nothing. Nor does it much concern us, so that the Virgin Mary be conceived in such manner after the common way, that Christ may still be excepted, as alone conceived in the way peculiar to Himself, that is, without man. For it must so have been that Christ, God and man, would be conceived in all His members perfect; wherefore it was necessary that His should be the most spiritual and most holy of all conceptions. But in the conception of the Virgin Mary, whose body was formed in progress of time, and after the manner of other children, until the infusion of the soul there was no need of such a conception, for it could be preserved from original sin until the soul was to be infused. And the other conception, that is to say, the infusion of the soul, is

piously believed to have been accomplished without original sin. So that, in that very infusing of the soul, the body was simultaneously purified from original sin, and endowed with divine gifts to receive that holy soul which was infused into it from God. And thus in the first moment it began to live, it was exempt from all sin. For before it could begin to live, perhaps it may be said that there was neither absence nor presence of sin, for that only belongs to the to the soul and to the living man. Thus the Virgin Mary holds as it were a middle position between Christ and other men. For if indeed Christ, when He was conceived, was both living, and at that very moment was full of grace, whilst other men are without grace, both in their first and in their second conception; so the Virgin Mary was, according to the first conception, without grace, yet according to the second conception, she was full of grace. Nor was this without reason. For she was the midway between all nativities, being born of a father and mother, but bringing forth without a father, and being made the mother of a Son who was partly of the flesh and partly of the Spirit. For Christ was conceived partly of her flesh and partly of the Holy Ghost. Moreover, Christ is the father of many children, without a carnal father, and without a carnal mother. But as the Virgin Mary is properly the midway between the carnal and the spiritual nativity, the end of the carnal but the beginning of the spiritual, so she justly holds the midway in her conception. For as the rest of mankind are, both in soul and in body, conceived in sin, whilst Christ is conceived without sin, as well in body as in soul, so the Virgin Mary was conceived, according to the

body, indeed, without grace, but according to the soul, full of grace. This is signified by those words which the angel Gabriel said to her, 'Blessed art thou amongst women.'* For it could not be said to her, 'Blessed art thou,' if at any time she had been obnoxious to the curse. Again, it was just and meet that that person should be preserved from original sin from whom Christ received the flesh by which He overcame all sins. And that, indeed, is properly called blessed which is endowed with divine grace, that is, which is free from sin. Concerning this subject, others have written far more things, and have alleged beautiful reasons, but it would lead us to too great lengths if we repeated them in this place."†

Such is the testimony which the founder of Protestantism has left on record concerning the Immaculate Conception.

* Luke i, 28.

† Martini Lutheri Postillæ. In die Conceptionis Mariæ Matris Dei. p. 360-1. Argentorati apud Georgium Ulricum Adlanum, anno. xxx.

CHAPTER XV

The Voice of the Divines

No controversy arose on the Immaculate Conception until the twelfth century. The festival in its honour had been established from an early period in the east, in Spain in the seventh, in Naples by the ninth, in England in the eleventh century, but as yet it had not been instituted in Rome.

In the days of St Bernard the festival had begun in Lyons, whereupon the saint addressed a vehement letter to the canons of that Church, in which he reproved them for taking the step upon their own authority and before they had consulted the Holy See. And, in the earnestness of his denunciation, he questioned the mystery. Yet it is evident from the tenor of his language that he had no idea in his mind beyond that of the active conception, and that the distinction between the active conception and the passive, or animation, had not yet been drawn. The words of St Bernard are unmistakable. He says: "If therefore she could not be sanctified before her conception, since she was not in existence; nor in the conception itself, on account of the sin which was in it, it follows that she was sanctified in the womb after conception, which, by her being cleansed from sin, made her nativity holy, not her conception."* St Bernard, then, is clearly arguing upon the notion of the active con-

* Ep. 174, ad Canonicos Lugd.

ception, which the Church does not contemplate in the mystery. Hence Albert the Great observes: "We say that the Blessed Virgin was not sanctified before animation, and the affirmative contrary to this is the heresy condemned by St Bernard in his epistle to the canons of Lyons."* And St Bonaventure also says that from St Bernard's words "it is simply to be conceded that her flesh was not sanctified before animation."*

St Bernard was at once replied to by a treatise on the Conception, written by either Richard of St Victor or Peter Comestor. After the saint's death the controversy arose anew between Nicholas, an English monk of St Alban's, and Peter Cellensis, the celebrated bishop of Chartres. Nicholas defended the festival as established in England, and Peter, though he maintained to the last that the authority of the Holy See should have been invoked, yet at the conclusion of the controversy he expressed his agreement with Nicholas in these words: "You praise the Blessed Virgin, and I praise her. You preach her holy, so do I. You exalt her above the angelic choirs, so do I. You say she was exempt from all sin, and I say it. Turn and re-turn the question of her veneration, and of her glorification in every condition, and I go with you, I feel with you."†

The point continued to be debated throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and great names appeared on both sides. St Thomas at first pronounced in favour of the doctrine, in the passage quoted in a former chapter from his "Treatise on the Sentences," yet in his great work, the "Sum of Theology," he concluded

* In 3, dist. 3, art. 4.
† Pet. Cel. l. 9 Ep. 10; Bib. Max. Patr., Vol. XXIII.

against it. Much discussion has arisen as to whether St Thomas did or did not deny that the Blessed Virgin was immaculate at the instant of her animation. And most learned books have been written to vindicate him from having actually drawn the negative conclusion. But after all the researches that have been made into manuscripts and early editions of his works; though some manuscripts and five editions are found to represent him as really teaching the doctrine, and that in both the "Sum of Theology" and in other of his works; and though some of the greatest divines even of his own order and of his own school, and those of an early period, represent him as having had no intention of opposing it; yet it is hard to say that St Thomas did not require an instant, at least, after the animation of Mary before her sanctification. His great difficulty appears to have arisen on the question how she could have been redeemed if she had not sinned. This difficulty he has raised in not fewer than ten passages in his writings. But whilst St Thomas thus held back from the essential point of the doctrine, it is most worthy to be remarked that he himself laid down the principles which, after they had been drawn together, and worked out through a longer course of thought, enabled other minds to furnish the true solution of his difficulty from his own premises.

Up to this time a great deal of the objection owed its existence to a want of clear insight into the subject in dispute. The word *conception* was used in different senses, and those different senses had not been separated by careful definitions. The language employed in certain of the arguments wanted the same kind of clearing up. The argument laboured, in fact, under an am-

biguous middle term. Thus the disputants were often contending for the same truths, and their words alone were actually in conflict. Whilst speaking of these disputes, it may be well to call to mind that the teaching authority in the Church is in the episcopacy, and not in the schools of theology. The work of theologians is to bring together and classify the teachings of authority, and to elucidate them by their learned reasonings. The popes and bishops are the true guardians of the divine traditions. Valuable as their great works are, the divines of those times are not so much distinguished for the investigation of evidence as for the exercise of their powers of reasoning. Not many of them made any great study of the Fathers or of history. They read the western Fathers more than those of the eastern Church, who are much the fullest on the tradition of the Immaculate Conception. And many works of the Fathers which had been lost sight of have since been brought to light and made accessible.

The authority of St Thomas had a decided influence for a time, but with his great intellect he had himself prepared the way for a more clear comprehension of the subject.

But the famous John Duns Scotus, first at Oxford and then in a disputation before the University of Paris, laid the foundations of the true doctrine so solidly, and dispelled the objections in a manner so satisfactory, that from that moment it prevailed. It was Scotus who removed the great objection of St Thomas. He proved that so far from being excluded from redemption the Blessed Virgin obtained of her divine Son the greatest of graces and redemptions through that very mystery of her imma-

culate preservation from all sin. He says: "The Blessed Virgin was never at enmity [with God] on account of actual sin nor on account of original sin; she would have been so, however, had she not been preserved from it." * And from this time the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception not only gained a vast deal of ground in the schools of the universities and became the common opinion there, but the Feast of the Conception came to be established in Rome. This was done under Nicholas III., or perhaps Clement V., and the example spread widely through those countries where it had not been previously adopted. With the exception of the Dominicans all or nearly all the religious orders took it up, and the devotion sank deeply into the hearts of the people.

Still the controversy continued, but the defenders of the opposing doctrine became more and more limited in numbers, and were almost confined to the members of the order to which we have alluded. In the year 1439 the dispute was brought before the Council of Basle, and after it had been discussed for the space of two years before that assemblage, the bishops declared the Immaculate Conception to be a doctrine which was pious, consonant to Catholic worship, Catholic faith, right reason and Holy Scripture, and that it ought to be approved and embraced by all Catholics; nor, said they, was it henceforward allowable to preach or declare to the contrary.† But as the Council was at the time without a head, it was not in a position to exercise authority or to prescribe to the Church. Its decree is only adduced to show the sentiments entertained by the bishops there as-

* III Dist. xviii, q. 13. † Mansi, xxix, 182.

sembled. The controversy therefore continued, until in the year 1476 Pope Sixtus IV, with a view of putting a stop to the scandals and disedification which it occasioned, granted indulgences to all who recited the canonical office or assisted at the mass of the Immaculate Conception.* And as this did not prove sufficient to appease the conflict, in 1483 the same pope published another constitution, in which he punished with excommunication all those of either opinion who charged the opposite opinion with heresy, since the Holy See had not as yet pronounced upon it.†

In the year 1546 the great Council of Trent declared that, "It was not the intention of this holy Synod to include in the decree which concerned original sin the blessed and immaculate Virgin Mary, Mother of God."‡ But as this decree did not define the doctrine—although it was well known that with very few exceptions the great body of the bishops assembled were inclined to the pious belief—the theological opponents of the mystery, though more and more reduced in numbers, did not yield in their pertinacity. But as great scandal and offence were given in the Church by persons who brought up the discussion in public disputations, and even in the pulpit, St Pius V not only condemned the proposition (73) of Baius, that "No one but Christ was without original sin, and that therefore the Blessed Virgin had died because of the sin contracted in Adam, and had endured afflictions in this life like the rest of the just, as punishments of actual and original sin;" but the same holy

* Cum præ excelsa, March, 1476. Mansi, xxxii, 373.
† Grave nimis, Sep., 1483. Mansi, xxxii, p. 374.
‡ Sess. V, de Peccato orig. 5.

pope published another constitution, in which he forbade all public discussions by word or writing in any living language from either party, and only allowed of moderate disputation in private. Finally, he inserted the office of the Conception in the Breviary, and the mass of the same mystery in the Missal, and made it a feast of obligation.*

But whilst these disputes went on, the great universities and almost all the great Orders had become so many bulwarks for the defence of the Immaculate Conception. In the year 1497 the University of Paris unanimously decided and published a statute to the effect that henceforward no one should be admitted as a member of the university who did not swear that he would to the utmost assert and defend the position that the Blessed Virgin was preserved free and exempt from original sin. Toulouse followed the example; and in Italy, Bologna, and Naples; in Germany Cologne, Mayence and Vienna; in Belgium Louvain; in England before the reformation, Oxford and Cambridge; in Spain Salamanca, Toledo, Seville and Valentia; in Portugal Coimbra and Evora; in South America Mexico and Lima; all these great universities and seats of theological learning bound their members by oath to defend the Immaculate Conception.

The most celebrated religious Orders rendered homage to the privilege of Mary; several of them had done so even from their first foundation. The Premonstratenses celebrated an office established by their founder St Norbert himself, in which they greeted the Blessed Virgin as "pre-

* Super Speculam, Dec., 1570; Quod a nobis, July, 1568; Superni omnipotentis, March, 1571.

served by the Holy Ghost, and triumphing without harm over the great sin of our first parents."

The Friars Minor, in a general Chapter in 1621, declared unanimously that they had honoured the Blessed Virgin as conceived without sin from the very beginning of their Order, and bound themselves by oath to teach the mystery in public and in private and to promote devotion to it. In the year 1621, at a General Chapter held in Segovia in Spain, all the Observant Franciscans renewed the oath that their predecessors in the Seraphic Order had already taken to mantain and defend the belief in the Immaculate Conception, and to teach it everywhere to Christian peoples.*

The Carmelites by a statute which dates from 1306 not only celebrated the festival, but made a daily commemoration of the mystery.

The Trinitarians had an office in honour of the mystery, and the introit of the mass began: "Let us celebrate the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary."

The Order of Mary for the Redemption of Captives bore the white scapular in memory of the Immaculate Conception, and ended their daily meditation with the following prayer: "O God, who didst preserve the immaculate Virgin Mary from all stain of sin in her conception, grant that we, who truly believe the purity of her innocence, may feel that she intercedes for us with Thee."

The military orders of Santiago, of Calatrava and of Alcantara went still further, for they all vowed to defend the doctrine with their blood.

The Carthusians, the Cistercians, the Celestines, the Jeronimites, the Minims, the Camal-

* Palmier Seraphique, Tom. xii, 119.

dolese, the Cluniacs and the Servites all adhered to the pious belief.

The Society of Jesus had been conspicuous from its beginning in defending the doctrine and honouring the devotion.

One celebrated Order was alone found absent from the general unanimity. The Dominicans were under special obligation to follow the doctrines of their great divine St Thomas; and though there were some learned and famous men of the Order, flourishing not long after St Thomas, who declared that the saint did not deny but that he actually maintained the immaculate preservation of Mary at the instant of her animation, yet the common conclusion was to the contrary. The principal men of the Order who held the former opinion, were the Englishman John Bromyard, the Spaniard John of St Thomas, and Capponi the Italian Dominican, who in his learned elucidations on the Sum of St Thomas holds that the angelic doctor is not to be understood as speaking of original sin as if actually incurred by the Blessed Virgin, but simply of the debt of its criminality which would have been incurred, if by a singular privilege she had not been preserved from it.*

There can be no doubt but that, had St Bernard and St Thomas lived in these days, those two great assertors of the other privileges of the Blessed Mother of God would have been amongst the foremost to defend and uphold her stainless origin. For both of them expressly taught the principle laid down by St Augustine, that the Church never celebrates any festival except of what is holy. And they both had proved the holiness of the birth of the Blessed

* Notat. 3 ad iii, q. 27, a. 2.

Virgin from the fact that her nativity was observed as a festival throughout the Church. St Bernard concluded his celebrated letter in these words: "But what I have said I have certainly said without prejudice to what may be more soundly thought by one more wise. I reserve all this, and everything else of the kind, for the examination and judgement especially of the Roman Church, and if I think in anything differently, I am prepared to be amended by its judgement."* And St Thomas, in the very article in which he seems to stand opposed to the pious belief, makes the following declaration: "Although the Roman Church may not celebrate the Conception of the Blessed Virgin, it yet tolerates the custom of some other Churches which do celebrate the festival, hence such celebration is not to be wholly disapproved of, nor is it to be understood, because the festival of the Conception is celebrated, that she was holy in her conception, but because, the time when she was sanctified being unknown, it is rather the feast of her sanctification than conception which is celebrated on the festival day of the conception."† What, then, would St Bernard have said, and what would St Thomas have said, had they seen a pope, and he a saint of the Dominican Order, establishing the festival and making it of precept for the whole Church? What would they have said had they witnessed the devotion and the fervour with which it has long been everywhere celebrated?

But it is a popular error that the Dominican Order has always and in almost all its distinguished men been opposed to the pure origin the Blessed Virgin. Historians affirm that St

* Ep. 174 ad Can. Lugd. †III, q. 27, a. 2, ad 3 am.

Dominic wrote a book against the Albigenses in defence of three principles, one of which was the Immaculate Conception. They appeal to a tablet preserved in the archives of Barcelona from almost the days of St Dominic, who died in 1221. In that tablet it is recorded that the Albigenses denied that Christ could be the true Redeemer, or that the sacred host did contain His real body; and one of the reasons alleged for His not being the true Redeemer was that He was not born of an immaculate Virgin, but of one stained with original sin. Against these errors St Dominic wrote a book "On the Flesh of Christ," in which he both maintained the redemption of Christ, and defended the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin. He maintained in it that it was of her the Holy Ghost had said through Solomon: "Thou art all fair, O my love, and there is not a spot in thee."* The following words are also quoted from his book, which is no longer to be found: "As the first Adam was formed of virgin earth, which was never accursed, so it was becoming that it should be in the second Adam." It is further said that the Albigenses with whom the saint disputed, declared that if his book were cast into the fire and came out unharmed, they would believe in it, and that St Dominic threw it into a furnace, and it did come out uninjured.†

Spondanus in his annals,‡ Catherinus and other writers assert that the feast of the Conception was celebrated in the Dominican Order from its very commencement until the year 1387, when

* Cant. vi, 7.
† For the authorities see *Innocentia Vindicata*, sec. 5.
‡ Ad An. 1387.

the word Conception was changed for that of Sanctification. In an ancient Dominican Martyrology, written in 1254, the Conception of the Blessed Virgin is marked as a double feast, as also in their Martyrology printed in 1579. From a book of "Hours of the Blessed Virgin, printed in Paris in 1529 for the use of the Fathers of the Dominican Order," Cardinal Sfrondato cites these remarkable passages. From the prayer: "O God, who for the salvation of the human race didst deign to assume flesh from the glorious Virgin, and didst choose her from before the ages to be Thy mother, and to be conceived without stain, grant," etc.; from the hymn at Tierce: "The praiseworthy Conception announced by the angel to Mary, who was so lovingly preserved in her Conception;" from the Hymn at Vespers: "Hail, Star of the Sea, without stain conceived." *

Amongst the distinguished Dominicans who are mentioned as maintaining the mystery are Albert the Great, Vincent of Beauvais, St Vincent Ferrer, Taulerus (the great mystic writer), John of Viterbo, St Louis Bertrand, the venerable Jerom Lanuza, St Raymond of Pennafort, Cardinal Hugo, Louis of Grenada, Melchior Canus and Natalis Alexander. It is now two hundred years since Nieremberg enumerated five generals, twelve masters of the Sacred Palace, and about a hundred doctors of the Dominican Order, who had written or spoken in defence of the Immaculate Conception.†

The Dominicans of Spain in their Provincial Chapter of 1524 decreed that, "Whereas the Dominican Order has hitherto sustained the

* "Innocentia Vindicata," sec. v, p. 36.
† "Innocentia Vindicata," sec. v.

opinion that the Blessed Virgin was conceived in original sin, this is not now so to be considered, for it is a matter of no utility, and is exceedingly scandalous, especially as almost the entire Church (whose usage and authority should hold, according to St Thomas, against the *dictum* of any individual doctor) asserts at this time that she was preserved therefrom." And the Provincial Chapter of 1683 petitioned Pope Paul V that "they might recite the office and celebrate the festival of the most pure Conception of the Mother of God."

The fourteenth Prayer of St Catherine of Sienna has been alleged to prove that this glorious saint of the Dominican Order was opposed to the exalted privilege of the Mother of God, and that she was illuminated to do so by express revelation. But although the edition published at Brixen in 1496 contains a passage to this effect, and it is reprinted in the Aldine edition of 1500, in the more esteemed edition published at Cologne in 1559, and corrected by Loher upon a MS. supposed by Echard to be contemporary with the original, it is left out. And the Bollandists have, upon the authority of this edition, pronounced it spurious. But the standard edition is that given to the world by Gigli, a noble Siennese, in 1707. All the original manuscripts extant were brought together for the preparation of this edition, and Gigli professes to give the twenty-six prayers of the saint exactly as they came from her lips in her native Siennese. "I now restore them," he says in the preface of the fourth volume of her works, "most exactly as they were dictated by her and collected by Thomas Buonconti of Pisa, one of her disciples and followers." But Gigli rejects the supposed

revelation, and gives his reasons for doing so.* Its authenticity has been learnedly refuted by del Rio,† Lancisius,‡ Wadding§ and Peter de Alva,‖ the learned Dom Cardinal Gotti¶ and Maracci, who wrote a treatise expressly on the subject.** St Antonius has been unfairly quoted as the authority for this fictitious revelation, and for placing it in antagonism with the revelations of St Bridget for the true doctrine. The sainted Archbishop of Florence only quotes a certain John of Naples, who is the first author of the assertion.†† And in his "Life of St Catherine" he says nothing of this revelation, though he treats professedly of her revelations. Neither does the Blessed Raymund of Capua, the confessor and amanuensis of the saint, who wrote many particulars of her revelations in his celebrated Life of the Saint. Nor does Thomas of Sienna, nor any other of her disciples, who recorded her acts so carefully, though such a revelation would have been too remarkable in that age of the controversy, and too much in accord with the ideas of many of the Dominican school, to have been easily passed over. The whole story rests on the Brixian edition, and the passage in the prayer is supposed to have been foisted (?) in at that bitter period of the controversy by an antagonist of the Immaculate

* Gigli refers at length for his reasons for the omission in a note after the prayer, Vol. IV, to annotations in Vol. I, p. 2, which volume I have not been able to meet with.

† L. 4 Disquisit. Magic. q. 3, s. 4.

‡ Opuscula, t. 2, opus. 11.

§ In descriptione Legationis Cathol. Regum., sec. 3, orat. 10, ad Paulum V.

‖ In Sole Veritatis, n. 201.

¶ La vera Chiesa di Christo, t. 1, cap. 7.

** Vindicatio S. Catherinæ Siensis.

†† In 1a Summæ, tit. 8, c. 2.

Conception. Peter de Alva maintains that it is traceable to Vincent Bandello. On examination it will be found, first, that the passage is not in the usual and very remarkable style of St Catherine; secondly, it stands in the style of a scholastic argument, and this is a note against the genuineness of a revelation; thirdly, it does not cohere with the authentic portion of the prayer, though conjoined to it as an inference with a "therefore is the Eternal Word given unto us," for what precedes is but a sharp rebuke to a grievous sinner; fourthly, it denies the preservation of the Blessed Virgin to be possible; fifthly, from the impossibility of sanctification before animation it argues to the impossibility of sanctification until after animation; sixthly, it speaks of original sin being a certain putridity in the flesh; seventhly, whilst written as a scholastic argument, it terminates in the tone of a revelation, "Thou knowest, O Lord, that this is truth," even though, as Cardinal Gotti remarks, St Catherine terminated none of her authentic prayers in this form.*

The Dominican Order had ever been conspicuous for their devotion to the Blessed Virgin; they had been the greatest promoters of that devotion through the Rosary; they had been founded under her especial patronage, and they wore their white habit in her honour. That devotion and the general action of the Church, have gradually worn away the prejudice in which so many of its members had been held as it were spell-bound against this doctrine by the influence of that great light of the schools, St Thomas. Yet it should be observed that, if as individuals a considerable number of Dominican

* Vid. Plarra, Causa Immac. Concept., act. 6, art. 1, test. 10.

theologians have held opinions which brought the Immaculate Conception into question, the Order has never itself and as a body uttered aught in any form, whether in its general or in its provincial chapters, against the doctrine so as authoritatively to exercise influence upon its members.* And in the year 1843 their general petitioned the Holy See that the festival of the Conception might be celebrated throughout the Order with a solemn octave, and that the words "Immaculate Conception" might be used by them in the preface of the Mass, and that they might insert the words "Queen, conceived without original sin" in the Litany.

Near the cell once occupied by St Dominic at St Sabina's, in Rome, there is an orange-tree, which was planted, says the tradition of the Order, by their holy founder. Shrunk with so many centuries of age, inclining towards the ground, and threatening a final decay, in the year when the reviver of the French Dominicans entered the Noviciate of that house, the old root sent up a new and vigorous shoot, which in the few last years has become an upright and comely stem, and last year bore fruit. May it prognosticate the restoration of that illustrious and venerable Order to its ancient splendour, under the protection of their immaculate patroness, of which restoration it is already giving goodly signs.

To conclude the history of the contest in the briefest manner. In the year 1622, in order to

* The Procurator-General of the Dominicans, Father M. Francis Gaude, has just issued a work on the relation of the Dominican Order with the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, and expressive of the firm adhesion of the Order to the dogmatic definition. It is entitled, "De Immaculato Deiparæ Conceptu, ejusque Dogmatica Definitione, in Ordine præsertim ad Scholam Thomisticam et Institutum F.F. Prædicatorum."

put an end to those private disputations and writings which were still going on, as the Pope intimates, between certain religious Orders, to the disedification of the faithful, Gregory XV imposed an absolute silence on those who either in public or in private, by speech or writing, were daring enough to affirm that the Blessed Virgin was conceived in original sin, until the Holy See should define the question. Those only were exempted from the severe penalties by which this constitution was enforced, who received especial permission from the Holy See. The Pope then enjoined that where the word "Sanctification" was still used, as it was in some instances, it should be expunged from the Mass and the canonical Hours, and the word "Conception" inserted in its place. The decree called signs of joy from almost every part of the Catholic world.*

But there were still intemperate persons here and there who raised the question under a new form. These persons affirmed that though the word "Immaculate" had indeed been associated with the Blessed Virgin by the Council of Trent as a general epithet, yet it was not to be applied to her Conception. The principal movers in this controversy were Bartholomew Spina and the unsound Launoy. To put an end to all further cavilling, in the year 1661 Alexander VII promulgated the famous constitution directed against those who, by their scandalous attacks, sought to disturb the pious faithful of Christ in the possession of that devotion and festivla which so many Pontiffs had favoured. He defined the true sense of the word Conception, as employed in the offices and devotions of the

* Sanctissimus Dominus Noster, May 24, 1622.

Church and in the constitutions of his predecessors, and explained it to signify that the belief which the ancient piety of the faithful of Christ had felt, and which almost all Catholics embraced, was that "The soul of the Blessed Virgin, in the first instant of its creation and infusion into the body, was, by the especial grace and privilege of God, and in view of the merits of Jesus Christ her Son, preserved and made exempt from original sin." † Finally, this Pope forbade all further glossing or interpreting of the Scriptures, Fathers or Doctors, in whatever way, as against the common and pious sentiment of the faithful. After this the faithful were left in peace, except when such intemperate men as Muratori and Ricci in the last century, or Hermes in the present, presumed to assail the holy mystery once more. But it is a significant fact that Muratori appeared under a mask, and in the three books which he published as often changed his assumed name; but the only result of his writings was to bring out to the light some of the most valuable works that were ever penned in vindication of the great privilege of the Mother of God.*

In looking through the vista of ages back to the beginning of this controversy the first thing which strikes our attention is the fact that it was never a division of the episcopacy. It was simply a conflict in certain schools which possessed no teaching authority. It began in a dispute as to the power through which a festival ought to be established in local churches. In the ardour of the moment, St Bernard called in question the

* Sollicitudo omnium Ecclesiarum, Dec. 8, 1661.

† See especially C. Octavius Valerius, De Superstitiosa Timiditate Vitanda, etc.; a work replete with curious learning.

holiness of the Conception of the Blessed Virgin which began to be celebrated, misled by the ambiguity of the word. The word itself conveyed two senses. St Bernard took up the term in its popular sense, which is not the one which the Church and her traditions contemplate. This confusion of terms embroiled and kept up the quarrel until the days of St Thomas and St Bonaventure. For so long it was like the old story of the gold and silver shield. St Thomas hesitated to adopt what was yet but a pious belief, not an article of faith, because he did not fairly see his way to reconcile it with the great dogmas of original sin and redemption. Scotus solved the difficulties of St Thomas. After this, opposition sank more and more, and almost all the great institutions of the Church became the zealous promoters or the valiant defenders of the Immaculate Conception; all the universities and almost all the great religious Orders were contending for Mary's privilege. It never came before the bishops assembled in their councils but they showed themselves inclined to it. It never came before the sovereign Pontiffs, but they protected it as a doctrine and encouraged it as a devotion.

Why, then, should the debate have been allowed to continue for so long a time? A full reply to this question would require an entire treatise on the Providence which guides the events within the Church to her final exaltation. Rosmini has written such a treatise, as St Augustine did before him, and their lofty principles require but to be applied to this particular case. I must content myself with a few very brief remarks.

God has allowed certain truths, though im-

plicitly contained in Scripture and tradition, to remain under a greater or less degree of obscurity up to a particular time. Such truths may even be explicitly apprehended and expressed at various points in the general current of tradition, but have not become as yet the daily object of the contemplation, the writing, the preaching and the devotion of the Church. Then some one who has not clearly seized the more or less latent sense of the Church on a given question commits himself to an opposite opinion. Suddenly the Church is startled, as when St Cyprian insisted on rebaptizing heretics. For the truth is in the Church, though it forms not as yet a part of her constant daily teaching. But that was a case involving a practical question which demanded instant decision. The first thing questioned respecting the Conception of the Blessed Virgin was the right of establishing its festival. It had begun in particular churches in the West, and the Holy See had not been invoked, nor had it set the example. And it was rather a vindication of the privileges of the Holy See, in respect of a point on which the Holy See itself observed silence. Then the controversy glided into the question of doctrine. But the language used was ambiguous: it might refer, and in St Bernard's case it clearly did refer, to the active conception, and this is not what the Church honours. But even this ambiguous language, wearing as it did the appearance of opposing the true doctrine, spread a feeling of disedification so widely as to show the sense which was latent in the Church. Still there was no great practical question as yet demanding an immediate solution. The devotion continued to spread with the festival, but the head of the Church had not yet sanctioned

it either by voice or example. Had the festival been universal at that time, the Church must soon have spoken. But as long as the festival was but partial, and had not the highest sanction, and as long as the language on both sides continued to be ambiguous, so that it could not be easily seen who was for the true tradition and who was against it; so long, in fact, as both parties might be contending for the same thing under a different phraseology, the Church waited until divines became more clear, that she might more readily point out her own sense in the controversy. And no sooner was the subject cleared up than councils and popes began to be explicit, and they all spoke in one direction. An overwhelming majority appeared on the side of truth as soon as it was intelligibly put forth. Opposition shrank within the limits of a single school, chiefly of one out of the many Orders which flourished in the Church. Even that school maintained the sanctification as taking place soon after, though not at the moment of animation. Nor was this maintained, by continually dwindling numbers, without offending the general sense of the Church to such an extent that the popes were compelled to reduce the opinion to silence.

We must then distinguish three periods in the history of the doctrine. The first is that of simple faith and tradition. At this period the Fathers speak of it, and even enlarge upon it by figures and comparisons, especially in the East, but do not apply to it the principles of theological reasoning. This takes us from the apostolic age to the twelfth century. The second period is that in which reasoning was first applied to the mystery. And then appeared a result that often has

occurred when reason is first applied to a revealed truth. Reason had to labour long before it could make the necessary discriminations, approximate the various principles which bore upon it, place the subject exactly in its proper light, adjust its relations with truths universally admitted, and reconcile it with conclusions worked out already in collateral subjects. But at all this reasoning and counter-reasoning, simple-hearted faith, which asked no reason beyond the fact that the Blessed Virgin was the Mother of God, was keenly scandalized. This may be called the period of ambiguous language. It dates from the twelfth to the fourteenth century, from St Anselm to Scotus. Then came the period when theological reason had pervaded the question, had cleared up its difficulties, and had harmonized the doctrine with the general scheme of theology, when, in short, it became a confirmation of those very truths which at first it had been suspected of opposing. And its acceptance became a reasonable acceptance, which the more learned investigation of antiquity served still further to confirm.

But this long agitation of human thought brought out lights to the understanding, which not only illuminated the mystery and invested it with new beauties for our contemplation, but also shed an effulgence on the several truths with which it stood related. And now many great minds made their offerings to the Immaculate Mother from the fruits of their genius, not from the necessity of defending the faith, but as free-will oblations of their devotion; whilst what they studied more laboriously, and professed more generously, and defended more ardently, was rewarded more abundantly!

Great virtues were brought into exercise, and a generous faith was cultivated by the very difficulties and denials with which devotion to the mystery was surrounded. And the faithful clung more fervently to the Mother of God for the express reason that her great privilege was gainsaid. Love of the Blessed Virgin was increased thereby, for we love that excellence more ardently which is assailed untruly, as we also love more earnestly what has cost us more dearly. What the heresies against Mary have helped to do from without the Church, that the opposition to her Immaculate Conception has done within the Church. It has developed the whole theology of the Blessed Virgin.

At the time when this mystery was most questioned, St Bridget was writing her revelations, than which none since the apostles, none that are not of divine faith, have received more striking testimonies of authenticity. In these revelations the Blessed Virgin is introduced as speaking to the saint:

"Know that my Conception has not been known to all, for God so willed it, that as the natural law and the voluntary election of good and evil preceded the written law, and afterwards came the written law, which restrained every inordinate emotion; so has it pleased God that even my friends should have pious doubts concerning my Conception, and that each should display his zeal, until at the preordained time the truth shall shine forth." *

* Book vi, 55.

CHAPTER XVI

The Voice of the Liturgy and the Voice of the Faithful

THE festival of our Lady's Conception was celebrated at an early period in the Oriental Church. The earliest records designate the solemnity either as the Conception of St Anna or as the Conception of the Blessed Virgin. In the Western Church this feast has been always celebrated on the eighth, whilst in the East it was observed on the ninth of December. The first mention of it that has come down to us is in the Typic drawn up by St Sabas, who flourished in the year 484. The Typic was the order or directory for regulating the divine office throughout the year, used in the monasteries of Jerusalem.* The next mention of the feast is by St Andrew of Crete, who was martyred in the year 761, and who also composed a hymn used in the office of the festival.† George, Archbishop of Nicomedia, who flourished in 880, has left three discourses on the festival, of which two are entitled "On the Conception of the Mother of God," and one "On the Conception of St Anne." In one of them he says that this festival has precedence over other solemnities by reason of the miracles consum-

* It should, however, be observed that this Typic was found in a very damaged condition, and restored by St John Damascene. Vid. Cave, Historia Literaria, p. 296. But it should likewise be remembered that St Sabas was a strenuous assertor of the mystery in his Menology.

† Bib. Max. Pat. x, p. 685. Ceiller, xii, 58, says the Odes attributed to St Andrew are not his.

mated therein, and that the mystery is a basis or ground-work on which whatever mysteries have been dispensed are gathered as on their foundation. "It is fitting then," continues the Archbishop, "that we should venerate the Conception as the beginning and cause of universal blessings, and celebrate it with a more earnest joy." *

The following passages are extracted by Abbot Guéranger, the celebrated liturgist, from the Greek office on the Conception of Mary: "In thee was the fall of our first parents arrested, deprived of its power to act against thee." "No one was ever without culpability like thee, O subject to no stain."†

In the most ancient of the Eastern Liturgies, the origin of which is ascribed to St James, the Blessed Virgin is commemorated as "Our most holy, immaculate and most glorious Lady, Mother of God, and ever Virgin Mary."‡ And three times this formulary is repeated. In the Maronite Ritual for ordaining a Chorepiscopus, which Morinus published from a very ancient manuscript, the Blessed Virgin is imprecated under the title of: "Our holy, praiseworthy and immaculate Lady, the at all times blessed Mary, Mother of God."§ In the Alexandrian liturgy of St Basil, she is invoked as: "The most holy, most glorious, immaculate, accumulated with blessings, our Lady, Mother of God, and ever Virgin Mary."‖

The word "Immaculate" is applied so constantly and in all ages as a title to the Blessed

* In Concep. S. Annæ, ad init. apud Cambefis, Auct. Bib. I, p. 1015.

† Mémoire sur la Question de l'Immaculé Conception, p. 77.

‡ Bibliothec. Max. Patrum, t. ii, p. 3.

§ De Sacris Ordinat. (1645) p. 416, (1695) p. 346.

‖ Rénaudot, Liturg. Orient. Collec. I, p. 70.

Virgin, that it may be well to consider what was the precise meaning that was attached to it. Hesychius explains it as signifying *pure and inculpable.* Suidas explains it as meaning *pure and without culpability.* The commentary on the Psalms, placed among the works of St Chrysostom, explains the word "Immaculate" as signifying "one cleansed from all vice, crime and defilement, one who is without spot, iniquity and sin."* St Ambrose says of Christ, that He was "immaculate" because He was not defiled by the ordinary conditions of birth.† St Ephrem says of Mary, she is "Immaculate and most alien from every stain of sin."‡ The word is used with allusion to the victims of the Old Law, which were to be immaculate, that is to say, without fault or blemish, as they represented the spotless perfection of Christ. It is used of Christ by St Paul as the immaculate or spotless Victim,§ and by St Peter, when He speaks of Christ as the immaculate or spotless Lamb.‖ It is used in no other sense in the New Testament, except when applied to the Church as the body of Christ,¶ or to the holy members of the Church who possess the fruit of redemption;** or to the blessed in heaven.†† In liturgical language it is limited to the most Holy Eucharist, as the spotless and inculpable victim, and to the Blessed Virgin, as the spotless and inculpable Mother of God.‡‡

* In Ps. cxviii, n. 1.

† St Ambrose, Enarr. in Ps. xl, ad verba "Propter innocentiam meam."

‡ Oratio ad SS. Dei Genitricem.

§ Heb. ix, 14. ‖ 1 Pet. i, 19. ¶ Eph. v, 27.

** Eph. i, 4; Coloss. i, 22. †† Jude v, 24; Apoc. xiv, 5.

‡‡ See Passaglia, who treats the subject at length, sec. 2, c. i, art. 1; also the Cursus Completus Theologiæ, t. xxvi, p. 659, de Immaculata.

The feast of the Conception was introduced later into the Western Church than in the East. The Spaniards have a tradition that it was introduced into their country at a very early period. It was a solemn festival throughout Spain in the tenth century, and Julian, a writer of that period, ascribes its introduction to St Ildephonsus three centuries earlier. In the Mozarabic Ritual, as revised by St Ildephonsus in the seventh and approved by Pope John X in the ninth century, in the canon of the Mass there occur these words: "Virgin Mother of God, whose true Conception we this day celebrate." And in the blessing for the people there are these words: "May He who preserves His Mother from the contagion of corruption, keep our heart immaculate from crime."* During its most flourishing periods the sovereigns, prelates and people of Spain were ever urgent to obtain a definition of this mystery, which has always been a most cherished object of the devotion of that nation.

In a church at Naples there is a celebrated calendar engraved on marble in the ninth century, and on it "the Conception of the Holy Virgin Mary" is marked on December 9, the day on which it is celebrated by the Greeks, from which Naples seems to have derived the feast.

But it was from England that this festival took its most remarkable rise and diffusion in the western Church. It is affirmed to have originated in our country from a vision, which appeared to Helsinus, Abbot of Ramsey, during a storm at sea in the time of William the Conqueror. Besides the two letters appended to

* Sfrondato, Innocentia Vindicata, sec. vi, n. 4 pp. 48 and 49.

the works of St Anselm, in which the vision is described, it is narrated in a manuscript of the twelfth century, formerly kept at the great monastery of La Trappe, and now in the Library of Alençon. It is described with the same details in the Metrical History of Wace,* who flourished in the reign following that in which it is stated to have occurred. The vision of Helsinus is also mentioned in the register of Ramsey Abbey, which is preserved in the Exchequer. There is a curious allusion to it in St Bonaventure on the Sentences† written about the middle of the thirteenth century. He says: "I dare not altogether reprehend the celebration of the Conception, for, as some say, it had its beginning not in human invention but in divine revelation. . . . But as this is not of authority, we are not compelled to believe it; but as it is not against right faith, we are not compelled to deny it." But St Bonaventure's difficulty at that time was, as he had said just before, "How could we securely celebrate the Conception unless the Blessed Virgin was sanctified before animation?" It is a glimpse of the state of the controversy as it then existed. It still bore on the festival and on the sense of the word conception which the festival had introduced. And St Bonaventure, as St Bernard, still saw no other sense in it, than its common acceptation as applied to the active or parental conception. The saint hesitates between the difficulty arising from the sense he attaches to the word con-

* Wace was a native of Jersey, born probably at the end of the eleventh century, a son of one of the Norman barons who accompanied the Conqueror to England. He was made a canon of Bayeux on the recommendation of Henry II.

† In III dist. 3, p. 1, q. 1, ad 4am.

ception, and the weight to be attached to the vision, aud he only escapes from it by supposing that the festival "may perhaps refer to the day of sanctification and not of conception." I shall give the narrative of the vision as quoted from the above-mentioned manuscript of the twelfth century.*

"When the Danes heard that England had submitted to the Normans, they were indignant at the loss of an island to which they pretended they had an hereditary right. They prepared themselves then for war, and armed a fleet for the purpose of expelling the conquerors. When King William heard of these things he thought them worthy of his attention. He chose a certain religious, the Abbot of the Monastery of Ramsey, and sent him into Denmark to inform himself of the truth of these reports. This abbot was an intelligent man, and having faithfully performed his mission, he re-embarked to return to England. His ship had already accomplished more than half her passage when suddenly there uprose a tempest which convulsed both sea and sky. The seamen, exhausted by their conflict with the waves, were losing courage, their oars were shattered, the cordage broken, and the sails rent; all hopes of safety had abandoned them. Then all in the ship commended their souls to God with loud cries. They called upon the Mother of God, the refuge of the miserable and the hope of the despairing. Suddenly they saw a man of venerable aspect, clothed in pontifical garments, who seemed to stand erect on the waves near the vessel. He spoke to the Abbot Helsinus, and said, 'Wouldst thou escape the danger of the sea?' As the abbot said that with

* In the Univers, Dec. 12, 1854.

all his heart he wished to do so, that august personage said to him: 'Know, then, that I am sent by our Lady, Mary, the Mother of God, whom thou hast so piously invoked. And if thou wilt attend to my words thou shalt be saved from the great peril of the deep, thou and thy companions.' The abbot promised him all obedience. 'Promise, then, to God, and to me,' said the angel, 'that thou wilt solemnly celebrate, each year, the feast of the Conception of the Mother of Christ, and that thou wilt preach the celebration of this festival.' Helsinus was a prudent man, and he asked, 'On what day must this feast be celebrated?' 'On the eighth of December.' 'And what office shall we take?' The angel answered: 'The entire office of the Nativity shall be said on the Conception.' After these words he disappeared. At once the tempest was appeased; and, driven forward by a rapid wind, the abbot and his companions came safe and sound to the shores of England. What he had heard and seen, Helsinus made known as far as he could, and he himself established the feast of the Conception in the monastery of Ramsey." *

The vision is said to have taken place in the year 1070. After St Anselm had been made Archbishop of Canterbury, in the year 1093, he is said to have established the feast of the Conception in the province of Canterbury.

In a council of that province held in London, under Archbishop Mepham, in the year 1328,

* On this subject see Appendix. Cf. Father Thurston's article in the "Month" for July, 1904. He says (p. 8): 'However improbable we may consider the supernatural elements of the narrative, it must be owned that the external facts are quite curiously confirmed by our extant records." He then quotes several which go to show that the sending of Helsinus to Denmark by William the Conqueror is an historical fact.

the feast was made of solemn observance. And the archbishop passed a decree in the following terms: "Adhering to the footsteps of the venerable Anselm, our predecessor, who besides those other more ancient solemnities of the Blessed Virgin, thought it worthy to superadd the solemnity of the Conception; we appoint, and by a firm precept command, that the festival of the aforesaid Conception be henceforth celebrated in a festive and solemn manner in all our churches of the province of Canterbury." * Earlier Synods had confirmed the observance of the feast, but not as one of solemn precept; yet in particular places it was observed with great solemnity before this time. For Geoffrey de Gorham, who was Abbot of St Alban's from 1119 to 1146, appointed the feast to be celebrated in his monastery in copes, in the same manner as the Ascension.† It continued to be solemnly observed in England down to the Reformation, and is still marked as a festival in the Protestant Calendar.

Driven an exile into France by the persecutions, first of Rufus, then of Henry I, St Anselm spread devotion to the Conception of the Mother of God in that country. It is the tradition of Normandy that he was the means of the establishment of the feast in that province. It is also asserted that it was through his influence that it was first introduced into Lyons. It was in that city that he composed his treatise "On the Virginal Conception." The feast was introduced into Belgium about the year 1200. Hungary is stated by Vincartius to have received it much earlier.

* Mansi, xxv, p. 829.
† Matthew of Paris, Vitæ Abbatum, vita Gaufridi, p. 62.

As early as 1072, John of Bayeux, Archbishop of Rouen, established a confraternity of the Immaculate Conception in that city. We must follow the history of this confraternity for a moment. In 1486, the Lieutenant-Governor of the city, Peter Daré, instituted a competition in poetry, the subject of which was the praise of this divine mystery, and henceforth the confraternity took the name of the Academy of the Immaculate Conception. The poet crowned the first year was John Chappé, whose poem has been preserved, and it goes into the whole doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. The Academy continued its existence up to the great Revolution. Caen would not be behind Rouen in celebrating the praises of the Immaculate Mother of God, and so in 1527 John Lemercier, a distinguished advocate, established a similar competition in that city, and in that rivalry some of the most distinguished scholars of France were crowned with laurel for their poetic strains in honour of Mary's immaculate origin.

It would take volumes to enumerate the confraternities and other pious institutions which everywhere arose under the patronage, or with an express view to promote the honour of a mystery which had so deep a hold on the piety of the faithful. It was to protect the piety of the faithful from the disedification inflicted upon them that the popes were induced to exercise so many acts of repression against that minority of divines who were disposed to attribute sin to Mary.

Nor should the universal conviction of pious Catholics be passed over as of small account in the general argument. For that pious belief and the devotion which springs from it are the

faithful reflection of the pastoral teaching. The more devout the faithful grew, the more devoted they showed themselves towards this mystery. And it is the devout who have the surest instinct in discerning the mysteries of which the Holy Spirit breathes the grace through the Church, and who with as sure a tact reject what is alien from her teaching. The common accord of the faithful has weighed much as an argument even with the most learned divines. St Augustine says that, amongst many things which most justly held him in the bosom of the Catholic Church, was "the accord of populations and of nations."* In another work he says: "It seems that I have believed nothing but the confirmed opinion and the exceedingly widespread report of populations and of nations."† Elsewhere he says: "In matters whereupon the Scripture has not spoken clearly, the custom of the people of God, or the institutions of our predecessors, are to be held as law."‡ In the same spirit St Jerome argues, whilst defending the use of relics against Vigilantius: "So the people of all the Churches who have gone out to meet holy relics, and have received them with so much joy, are to be accounted foolish?"§

We cannot do better than listen to the words of the learned Petavius on this part of the subject, for besides their inherent weight they have been adopted by the greatest writers in treating the subject. "I am inclined," he says, "towards the Immaculate Conception, most especially by that common sentiment which is entertained of it by all the faithful, who have this deeply rooted

* Contra Epist. Fundamenti, c. 4.
† L. de Utilitate Credendi, c. 14, n. 31.
‡ Epist. 36 ad Casulanum, n. 1.
§ L. contra Vigilantium.

in the innermost recesses of their minds and by all the signs and devotions in their power bear witness that nothing was ever created by God more chaste, more pure, more innocent, more alien, in short, from every condition and stain of sin than that Virgin; that she truly never did hold anything in common with hell and its ruler the devil, and therefore not with any offence towards God or with damnation. That very grave author, St Paulinus of Nola, has given us this excellent admonition: 'That we should depend upon the spoken sense of all the faithful, because the Spirit of God breathes on each believer.'* John Fisher, the Bishop of Rochester, in the book which he wrote for the King of England against Luther, taught how great is the weight of this universal suffrage of all Catholics even when not called forth or demanded by any precept, but spontaneously uttered. In the third chapter he is disputing on communion under both kinds, and he uses this amongst other arguments: 'That by force of no precept, but by tacit consent of people and clergy, the said custom grew up. That it was received by the silent suffrages of all, before we read that it was confirmed by any council. This custom grew up with the people, that is, under the guidance of the Holy Ghost. For no one doubts but that the Church is guided by the Holy Ghost, unless he disbelieves the Gospel of Christ. For in that Gospel the Holy Ghost Himself is promised, I say the Holy Spirit of truth is promised, that He may abide in the Church for ever, that He may teach her and lead her into all truth, and may declare what is of Christ, and what He has heard from Christ,' etc. . . . After this manner," continues

* Ep. iv, al. xxii, n. 36.

Petavius, "it is to be believed that God has made manifest to Catholic Christians that complete apprehension of what the Immaculate Virgin is, and has inspired that notion and that firm persuasion respecting her." *

There are so many things in the Church itself which tend to breathe the conviction into the hearts of the faithful that the Mother of Christ, that Mother whom Christ gave to us as a mother, is a sinless creature, and one whom grace created immaculate. They celebrate the feast as a mystery of grace, and they know it must be holy; they hear its praises from the pulpits, and read them in books written by holy pastors; they gaze on pictures and statues in which the mystery is symbolized; perhaps their church, their country, or their diocese, has been dedicated to the mystery; and if not, they know well that other churches and other dioceses are, and that this is the work of their bishops; they join in confraternities or in devotions to the Immaculate Conception, and they know that the popes have granted indulgences to encourage such devotions; they wear holy medals with the same intention; they think of the infinite purity of God, how He turns from all alliance with sin, and they judge what a Mother of the most pure God should be; they hear, perhaps they know, of miracles wrought by invocation of the Immaculate; they know what an exception Mary was to most of the common conditions of our nature; they know how Jesus loved her, and how she loved Jesus; they have never heard of her in the Church except as the *ever* Blessed Virgin, and as full of grace; they know how the Church has always shrunk from ascribing sin to her; and

* Petavius de Incarnatione XIV, ii, 10, 11.

having their souls breathed upon by influences like these, and aided by the Holy Ghost, with the truest instinct of grace and love they repel all thought of sin from association with the Mother of the world's Redeemer; indeed, it is not in their power to associate sin with her; but with the unerring logic of their holy and humble affections, they cry out; "Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us."

And what has produced this intimate and universal conviction but the analogies of faith? What but a sense of its truth, of its beauty, of its fittingness, of that honour which it reflects on Jesus, and of that glory which results from it to God? What has wrought the pious conviction but that religious sense, so far above the force of nature, which tells us that grace alone could have fixed our minds with such unwavering firmness of belief upon a mystery so heavenly and pure, so free from the corruptions of our nature, and so far removed from the bitterness of our own experience? What has wrought this universal conviction but that a sense of it was always living in the hearts of the faithful, those hearts in which the most pure image of Mary dwelt? The faith of it moved through the living frame of the Church before it was spoken clearly with her lips. She meditated on the mystery, and its light shone on her features, long, very long, before she reduced it into solemn sentences, and imprinted on them the seal of her infallible authority.

The miraculous medal, in these latter days, has been the favourite symbol of devotion to the Immaculate Conception. Can it be said of any other mystery or devotion that was ever called in question, that before the authority of

the Church had pronounced upon it, it was the custom of pious Catholics, in every part of the world, to bear a symbol of it, an actual material symbol of it, day and night upon their persons; and that this symbol was not even limited in its use to the children of the Church? The medal was revealed to a simple and holy virgin in Paris, in the year 1830, and bears upon it a representation of the Immaculate Mother as she appears in the great vision of the Apocalypse. It has acquired the name of *miraculous*, one can scarcely say how, though it is easy to tell why. But, except the holy cross, no other Christian symbol was ever so widely multiplied, or was ever the instrument of so many marvellous results. It has been in use just a quarter of a century, and countless have been the favours, the graces, the preservations, the conversions, the miraculous interpositions, of which it has been the occasion. Blind, indeed, is that child of the Church who has lived through this period and failed to recognize the benedictions which have flowed in upon the faithful through the invocation of this mystery, and the pious use of this symbol. Let us refer for a moment to the well-known conversion of Alphonse Ratisbonne. He was a young, high-spirited and accomplished Jew, well known, highly connected, and most strongly tenacious of his Israelite convictions. His contempt of Christianity had been deepened into hatred through the conversion of his brother. In 1842, and when at the highest content with his opinions, and looking forward to an early marriage with an accomplished lady of his race, he is induced by a pious Catholic gentleman to place the medal of our Immaculate Lady round his neck. I need not say that the prayers of his

friend accompanied that act, which Ratisbonne regarded but with ridicule. It was in Rome, and he entered a church to wile away a few moments whilst waiting for his Catholic friend. Suddenly our Lady appeared to him. She spoke not, but she signed with her hand, and he fell upon his knees, and in a few moments more he arose a changed being. Judaism had left him, and ignorant as he had been of the doctrines of Christianity up to that time, he was found to be completely instructed in all Catholic doctrine, and burning with desire for the sacraments. And for the love of Christ he renounced all the brilliant prospects which life had opened to him and embraced the cross.*

* See the account of his conversion written by himself.

CHAPTER XVII

The Voice of the Episcopate

I HAVE already noticed that the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception was never associated with any division in the Episcopacy. No council or other episcopal assembly has ever breathed a word against it. It never came before them but they showed their inclination to cherish and protect the pious belief. If we except Ricci, the Bishop of Pistoia, who was unsound on so many points, it would be difficult to mention a single bishop who, in the exercise of his authority, has ever opposed the doctrine. Here and there one, who had passed from the chair of theology to the mitre, may have maintained the contrary opinion as a private theologian.

The first council in which the doctrine is indicated is that celebrated Synod of Frankfort, in the time of Charlemagne. The bishops of all Germany, Gaul and Aquitaine, to the number of about three hundred, were assembled under the presidency of two legates of Pope Adrian, to condemn the heresy of Elipandus and Felix of Urgel, and the emperor was also present. The heresy maintained that Christ was not the natural, but only the adopted Son of God. This error naturally led to the consideration both of the eternal generation of Christ from the Father and of His human generation from Mary. And in their synodal letter to the bishops of Spain that passage occurs which we have partially

cited in a former chapter.* The fathers of the Synod say:

"But we would know this from you. When Adam, the first father of the human race, was created of virgin earth, was he made in the condition of freedom or of servitude? If in a condition of servitude, how then was he the image of God? If in a condition of freedom, why then was not Christ also of free condition from the Virgin? For He was made man of a better earth, of animated and immaculate earth, by the operation of the Holy Spirit, as the apostle says: 'The first man was made of the earth, earthly, the second was of the heaven, heavenly.' † If we confess that the earthly was constituted in a free condition, why do we not much more confess that the heavenly was of free condition? Whence was Adam made servile unless from sin? as the apostle Peter testifies: 'He who commits sin is the servant of sin.'" ‡

If the decree of the Council of Basle, in 1439, had not authoritative influence because of the absence of the pope or his legates, it shows at all events that the assembled bishops, who discussed it for so long a time, and expressed it so clearly, had themselves embraced that pious belief which they called upon all Catholics to receive and embrace. Spondanus records in his annals, that a dreadful pestilence had been raging in Basle, which ceased on a sudden when the Immaculate Conception was declared, as if heaven approved the doctrine, though not the general conduct of the assembly.

But in 1457 a council was held in Avignon,

* p. 122. † 1 Cor. xv, 47.

‡ John viii, 34; 2 Pet. ii, 19; Harduin, t. iv, f. 891; Mansi xiii, 893.

presided over by two Cardinal Legates of the Holy See, in which the decree of the Council of Basle was adopted and promulgated in the following terms: "We enjoin that the decree on the Conception of the most Blessed Virgin Mary, which was made in the Council of Basle, be inviolably observed; and we strictly forbid any person whatever, under pain of excommunication, from presuming to preach or dispute publicly to the contrary; and if any so do, it is our will that he incur the aforesaid sentence by the very fact. And in the first Synod to be celebrated in each several diocese, we ordain that the aforesaid decree be promulgated, and that it be enjoined on the curates of the churches, to make it known to the people." The decree is signed by the two Cardinal Legates, the Archbishop of Aix, and by twelve bishops of the province.*

If, in the great Council of Trent, no more was actually done than to declare the Blessed Virgin to be excepted from what was there decreed concerning original sin, yet the opinions of the assembled bishops were fully brought out in the discussions. Pallavicini, the historian of the Council, informs us that more than two-thirds of the bishops were disposed to insert the words, "who is piously believed to have been conceived without original sin." † And the Dominican Catherinus, who wrote a treatise in defence of the mystery, addressed to the fathers of the Council, and also assisted at these discussions, says in the preface to his work that many of the fathers thought it opportune, and for the best, that a decree should be passed approving and

* Harduin, t. ix, f. 1388; Mansi, xxxii, 186.
† Pallavicini, Hist. Conc. Trid. VII, c. vii, n. 3.

establishing that sentiment on the Immaculate Conception, which had long been celebrated and honoured by a solemn rite in nearly all churches, so that henceforth no one should be free to hold the contrary. "This was opposed by *a very few*," says Catherinus, and the ground of that opposition, observes this writer, was chiefly the consideration that they were assembled to oppose the heresies of the times, and that a more suitable period would arise for deciding such points as were debated within the Church.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there were but few synods, but devotion to the Immaculate Conception continued to be more and more fostered. Perrone gives an authentic list of three hundred bishops or heads of religious Orders who, between 1834 and 1847, had applied to the Holy See for authority to insert the word *Immaculate* in the preface of the Mass of the Conception.* About the same number applied for the privilege of inserting in the Litany of Loretto the petition, "Queen conceived without original sin." Under the present Pontiff† we have witnessed the revival of Provincial Councils, and on all sides they have re-echoed the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. Those, for example, of Sens, of Rheims, of Avignon, of Tours and of Baltimore, where the whole Episcopacy of the United States made a formal declaration of their faith in the doctrine. And during the same pontificate, petitions flowed in from prelates in all parts of the world, petitioning the holy See to pronounce a dogmatic decision upon the mystery. And it was after this ardent desire had been expressed by so great a number of the members of the Episco-

* Perrone, Appendix I ad Disquis. Theol. † Pius IX.

pacy, that Pius IX, in February, 1849, issued the Encyclical letter, "Ubi primum," from Gaeta, addressed to all the patriarchs, primates, archbishops and bishops of the Catholic world, in which the pope observes, that during the pontificate of his predecessor, Gregory XVI, a most ardent desire had wonderfully revived in the Catholic world, that the Apostolic See should at length put forth a solemn decision to the effect, that the most holy Mother of God was conceived without original sin. The pontiff dwells upon the number of illustrious bishops, chapters and religious Orders, including that of the Dominicans, who had petitioned the Holy See that they might publicly proclaim her immaculate, both in her litany and in the preface of the Mass for the festival. He refers to the great number of bishops who had petitioned his predecessor or himself, and had most urgently entreated that the Holy See would define as a doctrine of the Church, that the Conception of the Blessed Virgin was immaculate, and wholly exempt from every stain of original sin. He speaks of those men of our age, distinguished for genius, piety and learning, who, in their laborious writings, have so illustrated the subject that many wondered why the Holy See had not, by its solemn judgement, decreed to the Blessed Virgin that honour which the piety of the faithful had so earnestly longed to see ascribed to her. He then adds that he has appointed a commission of distinguished cardinals and of learned divines, to make a most accurate examination of the whole question. He urges all the bishops to enjoin prayers in their respective dioceses, that he may be illuminated with heavenly light to enable him to decide

whatever is most to the glory of God, the praise of the Blessed Virgin and the utility of the Church. Finally, he most earnestly calls upon all bishops to signify to him, each as early as practicable, what the devotion of the clergy and people of his diocese is towards the Immaculate Conception, and how far they felt the desire to see it defined by the Holy See. But especially, and above all, did he express his desire that the bishops themselves would convey to him what was their own sentiment and desire on the subject.

This celebrated letter brought out the sentiments of the entire Catholic Church, and placed them before its supreme visible head. Never before was the Church so thoroughly searched through on a question of her doctrine antecedent to its definition. Letters from upwards of six hundred bishops poured into Rome. Every one, without exception, expressed his firm belief in the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin, and his devotion towards this mystery of God's love and power. Four only raised any objection to its being defined.* But fifty-two, while declaring themselves satisfied as to the sufficiency of theological reasons for such a definition, and themselves prepared for it, yet hesitated as to its opportuneness at the present moment. Still all, whatever might be their own opinions, professed themselves most ready to obey whatever emanated from the Holy See upon the subject.

And here it may be well to say a word to those persons who imagine that the assembling of a General Council is essential for the definition of an article of faith. Many doctrines have indeed been defined in those venerable assem-

* Cf. Perrone, Th. Dogm. de Imm. Conc. B.V.M. 30, not. 1.

blies, but many have also been defined without the form of a General Council. Infallibility was promised by Christ to the teaching Church, that is, to the apostles and their successors; and that "for all days, even to the end of the world." Infallibility, then, is an attribute of the Church at all times, and not merely at the moment of a General Council. A council is but one of different ways in which the teaching Church expresses its judgement. Great and dignified, indeed, are those illustrious assemblages. But provided the head and body of the Catholic Episcopate speak with one accordant voice, their authority is equally great and decisive, whether they be assembled together, or speak severally, yet accordantly, from their sees. Thus the Pelagian heresy was condemned without the assembling of any General Council. Two Provincial Councils in Africa condemned the errors, the Sovereign Pontiff confirmed the decision, and the universal episcopate accepted his judgement. And hear how St Augustine speaks of it to his people: "Now, on this cause the two Councils have been sent to Rome, the answers also have come back from there; the cause is finished." *

And what does St Augustine reply to the Pelagians when, with the usual discontent of heresy, they cried out for a General Council? He exclaims: "What do they say?—that from simple bishops, seated in their own places, without the assembling of a Synod, a subscription is wrested? . . . . that the gathering of a Synod was required for condemning a pestilence so manifest as this? As if no heresy was ever condemned without the assembling of a Synod." †

* Serm. 132 de Verbis Apost., c. 9.
† Contra Duas Epistolas Pelag. l. 4, c. 12, n. 34.

If, therefore, a doctrine be pronounced, when occasion demands it, by the local episcopacy, as in the case of the Pelagians, and the Sovereign Pontiff confirms it by his solemn judgement, and the Catholic episcopate accepts and promulgates it, the whole teaching Church has spoken. Or if the Sovereign Pontiff pronounces a solemn judgement, as in the case of the Jansenists, and it is received and promulgated by the universal episcopate, the teaching Church has spoken. It has spoken, even as when the Fathers of Chalcedon, hearing the letter of Leo against the Eutychians, exclaimed: "Peter has spoken through Leo."* And if the bishops of the universal Church, each severally, declare the doctrine of their sees, and that doctrine is found to be unanimous, and the Sovereign Pontiff makes solemn definition of the same doctrine, the universal Church has spoken. The cause is finished.

No General Council ever brought out so universal an expression of the Catholic episcopacy on a question of doctrine as that brought out by the Encyclical of Pius IX in our own times. Each bishop, calmly seated in his diocese, with its influences around him, wrote deliberately down the tradition of his See, the sense of his clergy and people, and his own doctrinal judgement. And thus, whilst in a council a part of the episcopate alone can be present in person, and the rest by representation, in this case each bishop spoke in person, and the voice of the Catholic Church was found to be unanimous.

* Mansi, vi, 971.

CHAPTER XVIII

The Voice of the Holy See

We have now to hear the voice of the supreme pastor of Christ's flock, who sits in the apostolic Chair. We have to listen to that Head and Mother of all Churches, on which, as Tertullian says, "the apostles poured out all their doctrine with their blood";* and to which it is needful that all the Church should come, to receive from thence the form of sound words and the seal of every doctrine. We have to give our attentive ears to that Roman Church, "the place of Peter, the principal, the ruling Church, the root and matrix of the Catholic Church," as St Cyprian styles the Holy See.† For to Peter our Lord said: "I have prayed that thy faith may not fail: feed My sheep: confirm thy brethren."‡

From the first raising of the controversy to the solemn moment at which the doctrine was defined, the conduct of the Holy See exhibits a most beautiful instance of that wisdom, forbearance, delicacy and firmness which are the abiding characteristics of the Sovereign Pontiffs. From first to last their acts concerning the belief of the Immaculate Conception and the devotion of which it is the object, though extending over nearly four centuries, exhibit a consistency and unity of purpose such as might

* Tertullian adv. Marc. iv, c. 5.

† Ep. 45 ad Corn. de Poly. Had., and Ep. 55 ad Corn. de Fort. et Fel.

‡ Luke xxii, 32, and John xxi, 17.

have emanated from some one perspicacious mind. No matter from what school or from what religious Order a pontiff was raised to the chair of Peter, he was still found extending favour and protection to the sublime privilege of Mary.

From the decree of Sixtus IV in 1476 to the present day three-and-thirty pontiffs, including every pope whose reign was not too brief for many acts of authority, have issued constitutions either directly or indirectly favouring the doctrine or extending encouragement to the devotion of the Immaculate Conception. These papal constitutions before the close of the reign of Pius VI had reached the number of seventy.*

Towards the close of the fourteenth century, probably under Nicholas III, the feast of the Conception began to be celebrated in Rome.†

It was after Bandello of Castelnuovo had published the work in which he declared the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception to be heretical that, to remedy the scandal it occasioned, Sixtus IV granted to the faithful who should assist at a mass and office approved by him, which directly affirmed the Immaculate Conception, the same indulgences which his predecessors had granted for the mass and office of the Most Blessed Sacrament.‡ But as this was not enough to repress the boldness of the opponents, the pope issued another decree in which he strongly reprobated the conduct of those who dared to affirm that the Roman Church celebrated the spiritual Conception or

* For a list of these Constitutions see Passaglia, vol. III, sec. 7, c. 1, art. 3.

† Passaglia, l.c.

‡ Cum præexcelsa, A.D. 1476, Mansi, xxxii, 373.

sanctification only, and not the real Conception of the Blessed Virgin. He excommunicated those who affirmed that it was heretical to maintain that Mary was conceived without sin. And he designated the authors of such opinions as rash, perverse and scandalous. But, as the doctrine was not yet defined, he equally and with like censure forbade the contrary opinion to be held up as heretical.*

Innocent VIII, at the request of Elizabeth the pious queen of Castille, established a religious community under the invocation of the Conception, and assigned them a blue habit as a symbol of the immaculate purity of the Queen of heaven.†

Leo X not only confirmed the office of the Immaculate Conception approved by Sixtus IV, but gave the privileges of a jubilee on the festival to seven of the Roman Churches. ‡

Adrian VI confirmed a confraternity in honour of the Immaculate Conception at Toledo, of which the emperor Charles V was the first brother. §

Pius IV confirmed the Council of Trent, in which it is declared that the Blessed and Immaculate Virgin Mary was not included in what was there defined respecting original sin. ‖

As the publication of a corrected Breviary and Missal for the use of the whole Latin Church had been left by the Council to the Sovereign Pontiff, Pius V accomplished this

* Grave nimis, A.D. 1483. Mansi, xxxii, 374.

† Inter innumera, May, 1489.

‡ Ad ea, June, 1515; Super gregem, May, 1517; Pia Christi, February, 1518; Quia nuper, February, 1519; Ineffabilia, March, 1521.

§ Romanus Pontifex, July, 1522.

‖ Benedictus Deus, Jan., 1564.

great work.* Hitherto several different offices of the Conception had been used in various parts of the Church,† though that of Nogarolis, so called from its author, had been sanctioned, and had come into use in the Roman and some other Churches. This office directly affirmed the Immaculate Conception. But as an office was now required for the use of the universal Church, and as an injunction to adopt that particular office universally would have been equivalent to a definition, it was superseded by the one which writers have often called the office of Helsinus, as having originated through him, and already in use in various Churches. The office of the Nativity was adopted with the substitution of the word "Conception" for that of "Nativity." And thus the feast became universally extended, whilst the mystery was still designated in the office as the "Holy Conception" and the "most worthy Conception." To the Franciscans the Pope confirmed the use of the office of Nogarolis. Pius V also condemned the 73rd proposition of Baius, which maintained that "No one except Christ is without original sin; that hence the Blessed Virgin died because of the sin contracted in Adam, and all her afflictions in this life, as of the other just, were the penalties of actual or original sin." And to stop the controversial preaching and the publication of controversial writings which were often rash and occasions of scandal to the faithful, Pius V imposed silence on both sides in so far as the use of modern languages were concerned, until the question should

* Quod a nobis, July, 1568.

† There were at least five offices in use, those of Nogarolis, of Bernard de Bustis, of Quignonez, of Robert Gagnini and of Helsinus.

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be decided by the Holy See. He also confirmed the decrees of Sixtus IV. Such were the protective acts exercised towards the pious belief by a Dominican Pope, trained in the school of St Thomas.

Sixtus V, in his constitution "Ineffabilia," 1568, called the mystery "the most pure Conception."

Clement VIII raised the feast to the rank of a double major festival throughout the Church * and confirmed the acts of his predecessors. He also approved the Catechism of Bellarmin, which expressly teaches that "Our Lady is full of grace, for she was never attainted with the stain of any sin, either original or actual, mortal or venial." †

Paul V, considering that "the opinion which asserted that the Blessed Virgin was conceived in original sin gave rise to great offences against God, scandals and tumults," forbade that opinion to be publicly maintained in any manner. ‡

Gregory XV, to put a stop to the same scandals, prohibited even private discourses against the pious belief. And, as one religious Order had continued to use in their office the word "Sanctification," he enjoined that the word "Conception" should be everywhere adopted. §

Alexander VII declared it to be the ancient sentiment of the faithful that the most Blessed Virgin, by special grace and privilege, and in view of the merits of her Son, was preserved exempt from original sin, and this at the moment of her soul's creation and of its infusion into the body, and that almost all Catholics embraced this sentiment; and that it was in

* Ben. XIV, de Festis B.V.M., n. 207.
† Pastoralis, July, 1599, Bell. Cat. c. 5.
‡ Regis pacifici, June, 1616.
§ Sanctissimus Dominus noster, May, 1622.

this sense that the Church celebrated the festival of the Conception with her solemn rites.*

Benedict XIV addressed an encyclical letter to all the patriarchs, primates, archbishops and bishops of the Church, in which, recalling to mind the approval which Clement VIII had given to the Catechism of Bellarmin, that catechism in which the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception is so explicitly affirmed, he urged his brethren in the episcopacy in the most vivid language to adopt it for the instruction of their people.†

Everything had now been done short of an actual and formal decision, and the implicit faith of the Church had everywhere come out into explicit expression; and during the pontificate of Gregory XVI the bishops, the religious Orders and the other great institutions of the Church were petitioning the Holy See from every quarter and urging for a final definition. This ardent, this vehement desire became yet more widely manifested when the present pontiff Pius IX ascended the Chair of Peter.

Moved by so many entreaties, and by his own veneration and love towards the Mother of God, says an authentic document,‡ Pius IX, at the commencement of his pontificate confided to twenty of the most eminent theologians taken from the secular and regular clergy the commission of studying the question of the Immaculate Conception with the greatest care, and of stating their opinions in writing. For the same object he also instituted a commission

* Sollicitudo omnium Ecclesiarum, Dec., 1661.

† Etsi minime, Feb. 1742.

‡ Narratio Actorum Sanctissimi Domini Nostri Pii IX, Pont. Max. super argumento de immaculato Deiparæ Virginis Conceptu. Published at Rome by order of the Sovereign Pontiff.

of cardinals to the number of two-and-twenty of that illustrious body.

Forced by well-known events to remove from his see, the holy pontiff issued from Gaeta that Encyclical Letter in which he demanded of the bishops of the Catholic world that they should, in the most clear and explicit terms, make known what was the piety of their faithful diocesans towards the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God, and what above all was their own opinion and desire; and invited them to order public prayers to God, that He would deign to shed upon them the light of His Holy Spirit.

The theological consultors went on with their labours, and from the development of holy Scripture, the testimony of Fathers, tradition, the acts of the Church, and of the sovereign pontiffs, as also from the well-known declaration of the Council of Trent in its decree relative to original sin, they came to the conclusion that the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God could be defined, and that the definition was opportune.

In the meantime, knowing perfectly the gravity of the question, and ardently desiring to proceed with all the maturity possible, says the document which I am continuing to quote, the sovereign pontiff judged that he should spare no pains and omit no counsel that might be taken, in order that the question might be examined under every aspect and in all its bearings, and that with the greatest and most scrupulous care. After he returned to the city, he therefore appointed a special commission, composed of a select number of the same theologians, under the presidency of the late learned and

illustrious Cardinal Fornari. That special commission held many sittings in the course of the years 1852 and 1853, in which it weighed anew and with the utmost exactness and care the arguments from all the sources above enumerated, calculated to demonstrate the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mother of God, and to resolve all the difficulties that had at any time been raised against it. They finally drew up a summary of their labours, which was unanimously approved both by the theologians who formed the commission, and by the cardinal who presided over it. They then demanded the opinion of a particular Council of Cardinals, to the number of twenty-one, who having assembled together, after a searching and thorough examination of all things, judged in their wisdom that it was possible and fitting to define the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the most glorious Virgin.

In the meantime those six hundred and three replies from bishops were received from time to time, according to the distance of the country from which they were writen. And, by order of the Sovereign Pontiff, these replies were printed in nine volumes with an appendix, with which were also included letters from ecclesiastical bodies, religious orders, sovereigns, municipal corporations and other associations, humbly petitioning for the declaration of the doctrine. Sundry able treatises, written with the same view, were also added to this voluminous collection.

From this summary statement of the facts every person can easily comprehend what care and mature deliberation the Sovereign Pontiff has employed in the examinatioh of this question; what eagerness the Catholic Episcopate

has testified for the definition, and what ardent piety the faithful of the entire world have confessed for the holy mystery which is its object.

After all these preparations, and after sacrifices and prayers had been offered up from every part of the earth, his Holiness invited a certain number of prelates from each country to Rome, as representatives of the hierarchy, whilst he expressed his readiness to welcome as many other bishops as could conveniently come. A hundred and fifty archbishops and bishops responded to the call, among which number were representatives of many of the most ancient and illustrious sees and hierarchies in the world. There were others who represented hierarchies that had been either revived or established in our own day. From Asia and the East to North America and the far West, from the shores of the Baltic to Australia and the Isles of the great Pacific, the Church was there in her chief pastors assembled around the supreme head of the Church and the chair of Catholic unity.

On four several days this venerable assemblage of bishops met, under the presidency of three distinguished and learned cardinals, and the papal bull, drawn up and prepared for its final revision, was laid before them, and every part of it was freely discussed.

After the episcopal deliberations on the form of this momentous document were concluded, the Pope conferred upon it in secret consistory with his cardinals, who constitute his own especial counsel.

All was now ready. On December 8, the festival of the Immaculate Conception, in the ever-memorable year 1854, during the celebration of a solemn Mass which the Supreme Pontiff offered

up, surrounded by a hundred and fifty-two mitred bishops, fifty-three cardinals, more than two hundred prelates of an inferior order, a vast body of clergy from many countries, and some thirty or forty thousand people, who crowded the vast basilica of St Peter's; Cardinal Macchi, the dean of the Sacred College, advanced to the Pontifical throne, accompanied by an archbishop of the Greek rite, and an archbishop of the Armenian rite, and by twelve of the senior archbishops of the Western Church, as witnesses and supporters, and addressed to the Pope these words:

"For a long time, Most Blessed Father, has the Catholic Church most ardently wished and entreated with all her desires that, in your supreme and infallible judgement, you would define the Immaculate Conception of the Most Holy Virgin Mary, Mother of God, for the increase of her praise, glory and veneration. In the name of the Sacred College of Cardinals, of the bishops of the Catholic world, and of all the faithful, we humbly and earnestly entreat of you that, on this solemnity of the Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin, our common vows may be fulfilled.

"In the midst, then, of this oblation of the august and unbloody Sacrifice, in this temple, sacred to the Prince of the Apostles, surrounded by this solemn assemblage of the Sacred College, the bishops and the people, deign, Most Blessed Father, to lift up your apostolic voice, and to pronounce the dogmatic decree of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, at which there will be joy in heaven and great exultation on the earth."

To these words the Pontiff answered that he

willingly received the prayers of the Sacred College, the bishops and the people, but that they might be heard it was necessary to invoke the Holy Ghost. Then the *Veni Creator Spiritus* was intoned and taken up by the immense assemblage of the people. And after the sublime supplication, thundered from thirty thousand voices, had died away, there was a breathless silence, and the Pope, most deeply moved, and with his face bathed in tears, read to that silent but agitated assembly the decree of the Immaculate Conception, and solemnly defined that:

"IT IS A DOGMA OF FAITH THAT THE MOST BLESSED VIRGIN MARY, IN THE FIRST INSTANT OF HER CONCEPTION, BY A SINGULAR PRIVILEGE AND GRACE OF GOD, IN VIRTUE OF THE MERITS OF JESUS CHRIST THE SAVIOUR OF THE HUMAN RACE, WAS PRESERVED EXEMPT FROM ALL STAIN OF ORIGINAL SIN." *

Such is the solemn definition for which so many prayers and entreaties had been sent to Rome, and for which the whole Catholic episcopacy had been interrogated. And such is the wisdom, patience, care, diligence, deliberation, attention to the sentiments of the Episcopacy, and even of the people of the Catholic world, the ripeness of counsel and the earnestness of prayer with which the Holy See proceeds before defining a doctrine.

* Ineffabilis Deus, December 8, 1854.

CHAPTER XIX

Conclusion

THE sum and conclusion which results from this exposition is that the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of our Redeemer is as ancient as the mystery of the Redemption. It forms a component part of that grand scheme of human reparation disposed before the ages in the all-conceiving mind of Eternal Wisdom. The first intonations of the mystery reach our ears from the earthly Paradise. The words of the Almighty resound across the ages from the book of Genesis. And amidst the cries of woe and distress from our apostate progenitors, amidst God's terrible denunciations of their crime, amidst the tempest of maledictions which come pouring on the world, amidst the awful curses with which the wrath of the Eternal overwhelms the infernal author of our ruin, there breathe tender notes of His love for man, which prelude the solution of the world's catastrophe. They announce the coming of a new Mother, a Mother of life, a Mother who, as well as her offspring, shall be victorious over the devil, and shall pass untouched by his evil powers to the fulfilment of her great office. And the first intimation of the Gospel of peace is the proclamation of that Immaculate Mother: "I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed." *

* Gen. iii, 15.

And as the Old Testament begins by proclaiming her, so the New Testament begins with words addressed to her from heaven: "Hail, full of grace. The Lord is with thee"; * that is, as an ancient Father writes, "Hail, formed in grace." † Hail, in whom God always dwells. Hail, whose grace is coextensive with thy nature. And thus from the beginning the truth was sown both in the minds of the Fathers and in the hearts of the faithful. But there were some doctrines which, for the attaining of the mystery of salvation, shone forth at once like the sun in the mid-day, through the preaching of the Church. Others remained in the consciences of pastors and people, like enfolded and half-opened buds, to flower out and bloom in all their beauty, as a universally and joyously proclaimed belief, when the moment should arrive for the greater glory of God and the consolation of the elect.

For from the very limitation of the human soul, and the nature of the faculties which are the recipients of truth and which are not destroyed or fettered, but animated, exalted and freed by the gifts of grace; and from the limited and mysterious mode in which the light of truth is communicated to the soul; the result is that truth dwells not in us with the unchangeableness of death, but with the expansiveness of life. That light of truth leads to the rejection of profane novelties exterior to what is already believed and established, but hinders not such progress as successive explications of its own principles would give, whilst leaving those principles always one and the same. "He must be an enemy of God and men," says St Vincent of Lerins, "who denies that advancement can be made in the know-

* Luke i, 28. † Inter Opera Origenis, Hom. vi in Lucam.

ledge of religion. But to advance in faith is not to change the faith. For to perfect anything it must abide in its own nature whilst it receives some increase; and it is not a progress, but a change, when anything ceases to be what it was in order to become some other. Let a holy emulation animate the individual members as well as the whole body of the Church, that each age may arise above the one preceding in the science, the intelligence and the relish of divine things, yet without departing from the same sense, from the same faith, and the same unalterable dogmas. The human body grows and strengthens with years, but it always continues to be one and the same body. Yet great is the difference in the same man between his youth and his matured age. The condition of his state is changed, but not the substance of his nature. If portions of the body gather growth with time, that growth was comprised in the vital principles from their origin, so that nothing new has made its appearance in the man, but it was really in him in his youth, though hidden. Wherefore the rule and measure of growing to perfect proportions is age, insensibly unfolding the various parts which the wisdom of the Creator has formed in the child. . . . And the doctrines of the Christian religion must follow the same laws of increase; with years they must be consolidated, with time they must be expanded, with ages they must be exalted; yet so that they remain uninjured and uncorrupted, and retain a full and perfect harmony in all their parts, without diminution of their sense, or change of their properties, or alteration of what has been decreed." Thus in the year 434 spoke Saint Vincent of Lerins in his

famous "Commonitorium against Heresies" (28 and 29), written chiefly in defence of the decree of Ephesus, that decree which had proclaimed Mary to be the Mother of God. And the reader will not fail to see that every word of this beautiful exposition applies as freshly to the decree of her Immaculate Conception as it did fourteen hundred years ago to that of her divine Maternity.

When the Council of Ephesus decreed that in Christ there is but one sole person, when that of Chalcedon decreed that in the same Christ there are two natures, and when the third Council of Constantinople defined that Christ had two wills; these were not new doctrines, though they were new as dogmatic definitions. They were only the developments of that article of faith, that Christ is true God and true Man, and the only begotten Son of the Father. And the explication of this leads necessarily to our saying, that there is but one personality in Christ —that of the divine Word; two natures—the divine and the human; and consequently, two wills—one proper to the divine nature, the other resulting from the human nature.

And so in the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary. It is nothing new. It is but an explication of the grace, and of the supereminent purity which the Church has always attributed to the Blessed Virgin. It is but an explication of that high sense in which she was ever blessed and ever virgin. For the Immaculate Conception is but the expression of the perpetual integrity of her virginal soul. If the Church had said anything tending to diminish the idea which she has ever entertained of the sanctity of that sublime creature, then she would have uttered something new;

but what she has spoken is contained in that idea, as a consequence is contained in its principle, or as a particular in its universal.

It was always held implicitly or of pious belief, it is now held explicitly and proclaimed of Catholic faith. In the former ages "it was believed with the heart unto justice," but in our own "confession of it is made with the mouth unto salvation."* For in the ages past faith in the great grace of Mary had bloomed into the light out of the great heart of the Church in prayers, devotions, festivals, and God had answered them by graces, protections, miracles; and that faith was all but formally defined. Pius IX has simply proclaimed that the Church believes what she does believe. And all that is new is the gladness with which the children of the Church behold that their faith in their Mother's privilege has obtained its becoming position in the formulary of faith. "And in very truth," says the Sovereign Pontiff, in his Apostolic Letter, proclaiming the definition, "through the most deeply rooted sense of the Church, through her authoritative teaching, zeal, science and wisdom, the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin is every day more magnificently explained, declared, confirmed and propagated to all the people of the Catholic world and to the nations at large; . . . whilst the illustrious monuments of venerable antiquity of the Eastern and Western Church most strongly bear witness that it has always existed in the Church as received from those who preceded, and is stamped with the character of a revealed doctrine. For the Church of Christ, the careful guardian and assertor of the doctrines

* Rom. x, 10.

deposited in her keeping, changes nothing in them at any time, diminishes nothing, adds nothing; but with all industry, by faithfully and wisely treating ancient things delivered down from antiquity and spread abroad by the faith of the Fathers, she studies so to eliminate and burnish them that those ancient dogmas of celestial doctrine may receive evidence, light, distinctness, whilst they retain their fulness, integrity, propriety, and may grow only in their own kind, that is, in the same doctrine, the same sense, and the same belief." *

Mary is *the* Immaculate, as she is the Virgin and the Mother of God. As the two latter designations mark her position in the scheme of Redemption, so the former denotes her position in the scheme of grace. And the whole of God's plan for raising human sanctification to its highest term, in a crowning example and a masterpiece of redeeming power, comes out to view. The ascending scale of sanctities is completed. That mystical ladder ascends from the earth in Jacob's vision, and the angels ascend and descend upon it, and God Himself is leaning on it; and on its topmost degree, above the ascent of every other created sanctity, is placed the Immaculate Mother of God. The interval between the thrones of the saints and the throne of Jesus is filled up. The psalm sings of Christ in His glorious kingdom, that "The Queen stood at His right hand in a garment of gold, encircled with variety." † She occupies the first of the many mansions which her Son went up to heaven to prepare. Most truly she is but a creature, and Jesus is her Creator. But what a creature!—founded in original grace and the Mother of her

* Ineffabilis Deus, December 8, 1854. † Ps. xliv, 10.

Creator! All the saints were sinners once, but Mary was always the dear child of God. By her formation in grace above the saints, by her maternity above the angels, her position in the universe is clearly defined, its causes understood, her influence explained.

If the first of her glories in point of time is the last pronounced, it is because it was not so essential as those of her virginity and maternity for explaining the fundamental dogma of the Incarnation. Yet what an illumination does it throw upon all the mysteries of grace, as upon all the truths of faith! And how it advances a shield of light against the perverse deniers of the mystery of sin! For what does it show us?

First, it beams upon us rays reflected from the infinite holiness of Jesus. Then it reveals the wonderful care with which the way was kept pure and prepared for His coming into the world. Again, it shows how God abhors that culpable contamination in which the human race derives its origin. The Holy Spirit would not work the mystery of the Incarnation in one who had been infected by its venom. Nor would the Son of God take flesh, or maternal guidance in His youth, from one who had known that hideous defilement. Mary is "the bridge from God to man" across the unclean gulf. Jesus would call no one His Mother who had emerged from that gulf, or who bore upon her the remembrance of dishonour.

Then her primal grace is a light from the infinite purity and sanctity of God. For inexhaustible as are His mercies for sinners; rich beyond our comprehension as are His rewards for the regenerated and the just; ineffable as are the ways in which He gives Himself to the saints;

yet she in whom He is to take His earthly life, she in whom He is to hear and obey the will of His Father, must have a sanctity such that a greater cannot be imagined in a mere creature, a sanctity coextensive with existence, and a purity on which the shadow of ungodliness cannot rest even for a moment of time, or of any culpability, whether original or actual, mortal or venial.

Then the light from the mystery shows from a new point of view, how the Son of that Immaculate Mother was perfect God yet perfect man. For he broke down the universal laws of death and sin in the fallen human race, and reversed the conditions of the divine decree by a most singular exception from its tendencies, that He might obtain most pure flesh from a pure source. For the primitive integrity of human nature was not transmitted to her, but He re-established it in her, that she might be a most pure mansion for His Godhead. Her sacred Conception, then, is a light from His divine personality as from His united natures.

Then what an illumination streams forth to gladden us from her glorious redemption! It lifts up our faith to higher knowledge of the virtues of the Cross. It shows us that Christ has effected a richer redemption than comes within our own experience.

Again, Mary's Conception throws a light for us upon the freedom of Almighty God from necessity. What is a law of necessity in fallen man is no necessity with his Creator. Neither the act of Adam nor the act of Satan can restrain His graces or His favours. He can consult His goodness rather than His justice. He can arrest corruption as He wills, and make it

fly before His face. Nor is there anything in the fallen creature, at whatever moment of existence, to which the grace of Christ cannot have access where He so wills it and His honour is concerned. And in one glorious example He has put before us the height and depth, the length and breadth of His generosity, and displayed the full extent of the munificence with which He can protect and save.

Then again, from Mary's innocence how does light flow back to the primal innocence of Paradise! The second Mother is created in innocence as the first. But her graces are drawn from the deep rich fountains of her Son and Saviour's blood. And Satan has not power even to touch her with a finger. Incomparably more holy is the Mother of the living than was that mother of the dead. Wonderful reparation! Adam is created a living soul, and from his innocent side Eve is drawn forth, living and innocent, and she becomes the cause of his destruction. Mary is created in life from the side of Jesus ere He is conceived in her womb, and she becomes the Mother of salvation to Adam and all his race.

To what region of faith can we turn our eyes, but from the Immaculate Mary a new light is reflected on them? Sometimes it is a light direct, sometimes a light by contrast. The sacraments spring from the Body of Christ, and that very Body is the greatest of the sacraments. But the Body of Christ sprang from Mary. Yet she receives the fruits of the sacraments before they are instituted, and in a manner altogether pre-eminent. For baptism she receives the gift of original justice and of sanctifying grace. And the Holy Ghost confirmed her then with His enduring gifts. She is thus prepared to possess the

Body of the Lord, a Eucharist indeed, through which she renders incessant thanks to God. But first come those divine espousals, that union with the Holy Spirit, which sheds light upon all pure and divine unions whereby Christ is brought forth in the soul. And in that most pure creature, as in His sanctuary, did the great High Priest make the first oblation of Himself unto His Father. And here is a light of contrast for our humiliation. Penance she needed none; for the unction from the Holy One did ever anoint and sanctify each power of her nature from the moment of her animation to the instant of her expiration.

Whether, then, we would consider the power of Jesus over creation, sin, death or the devil, we shall find the highest example of its exercise in Mary. Or whether we would consider His condescension, love and goodness to His creatures, we have still the most beautiful instance in Mary. Or whether we would consider the depths of the riches which He won upon His cross, and the generosity with which He pours out those inexhaustible treasures, we shall find their most profuse expenditure was on His Immaculate Mother. Or whether we search the conditions of union with Jesus, we can contemplate them here in their most rare and absolute perfection. For to Mary alone of all saints can we add a perfecting clause to the Psalmist's words: "With the holy Thou shalt be holy . . . . and with the elect Thou shalt be elected," * and with the immaculate Thou shalt be immaculate. Or if we would contemplate the final end of all God's works, His praise and glory in His saints, it is Mary who renders Him the greatest praise and glory, and her pri-

* Ps. xvii, 26, 27.

mal graces are the deep foundation from which that towering glory springs.

In short, the Immaculate Conception of Mary is a summary of all the truths of the Gospel, displays all the graces of her Son, strikes down countless errors, and puts sin and the author of sin beneath her stainless feet.

Who, then, could have faith and understanding, and yet ask why at length the doctrine has been defined? The general prayer of the Church for the definition is the profoundest answer to the question. When the Church is moving through its length and breadth with desire to see a doctrine of faith exalted, the Holy Ghost is stirring in the Church. And of this we may be certain, both the principles of faith and the facts of history will bear it out, that the Church never rises to a loftier profession of her doctrine, or gives a greater expansion to her devotion, but it brings within her bosom a vast increase of grace, and great interventions of that Providence which rules her destinies. The Blessed Leonard of Porto Maurizio, in a celebrated letter which shaped out the whole way in which this definition has been brought about, records how he once said to Benedict XIV that whoever should define the Immaculate Conception would immortalize himself in this world and gain a great crown of glory in heaven. "But," said the servant of God, "of necessity there must first be a ray of light descending from on high. And if that ray of light does not descend, it is a sign that the time marked out by Providence has not arrived, and we must still bear with patience a most grievous embroilment of the world."

That we have reached a turning point in the

Church's history, no thoughtful Catholic for a moment doubts; but what her future shall be is the secret of the heavens. Yet, when the Church, uncompelled by any new error, bursts forth spontaneously with the solemn profession of one of her sublimest mysteries, it is a sure sign that a renewed vigour is animating her and strengthening her interior life.

If the decree be not directed against any novel heresy, it strikes at old heresies which were never so rife, so active or so malignant as at present. When it was defined that Mary is Mother of God, it was to oppose heresies respecting the Incarnation. The evil which now spreads like a cancer in the world beyond the Church, is ignorance or heretical denial about that tremendous fact on which the necessity of the Incarnation rests. Disbelief in original sin is one of the developments of Protestantism. In our own country it is a tendency, on the Continent it is an accomplished deed. But even here the grasp of opinion on that awful fact in human nature (for it is but opinion) is feeble. Its nature is not appreciated, its fruits are not understood, unless it be by a small minority who shrink from the name of Protestant, though they cannot escape from Protestant communion. Formal rejection of regeneration, through the rejection of the one means appointed for its attainment, is a clear indication of deep errors respecting the character of that disease for which Christ has appointed the one sole remedy of baptism. "What is born of flesh is flesh," says the Son of God. "You must be born again. Unless a man be born of water and of the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."*

* John iii, 6, 7, 5.

A religionism self-righteous and self-sufficient, steeped in the bitters of its own spirit, like the souls of the Pharisees—its votaries living on the sentimentalities supplied by the emotions of excited nature, and sinking helplessly when they subside and reaction sets in; self-deluded all the while by a use of scripture language and of scripture imagery, in which, not the sense of God, but their own is clothed—this religionism has generated a spiritual pride more dangerous and self-worshipping than any other kind of pride, whether sensuous or intellectual, for it seizes upon the very essence of man, and holds its dwelling in his inmost conscience. Emotion, springing from the fountains of sentimentality, the self-enjoyment of that interior sensuousness, and the use of the words of the bible as an organ for its development—this constitutes the inward essence of Evangelical religionism, whilst its outward works all indicate the interior craving for the like self-excitement and self-indulgence. Now this spirit, which finds all within, and asks for nothing from without, which confounds its own emotions with personal inspiration—a terrible source of spiritual pride—cannot admit of exterior means of grace. It cannot admit of the healing medicines of humility, of the very nature of which it is ignorant. To bend to an exterior authority, to believe that God has established such an authority in any real sense, to obey it, to humble the heart to receive grace from objective channels, to obtain a sacred strength from Christ through the ministry of His Church, that ministry which is the provision He has made for securing the needful preparation of humility and obedience—how can this be in those who cannot see that

God has ordained anything good which is exterior to themselves?

And as old traditions die away for want of vital nourishment, this self-sufficient spirit developes itself unchecked to its natural consequences. He who draws his spiritual resources from within himself will have subjective tendencies, and will be continually confounding his own fires with the lights of heaven. It was to remedy this danger that God provided those outward means of sanctification, and required our submission to them. When the instincts of pride become constantly mistaken for the inspirations of God, the next step will be to take our interior resources as the productions of our own soul. And so comes the blind conclusion that our origin was not sinful, but innoxious. Now this terrible pride, which is the source of so much error, fanaticism and false excitement, and which is so bitter against the doctrines and the disciples of humility, is the growth which springs from the seed which Satan has planted in the world. If that evil spirit cannot obtain direct worship of himself as he obtained it of the pagans, nor even the admission of a godship in him as he obtained it of the Manicheans, whose error has been so often revived, and in so many shapes; he has a third resource, and that is to lead men to take their own pride for God's light, to treat it as His truth, and to worship accordingly.

Sound knowledge of the remedy implies sound knowledge of the disease. And the rejection of regeneration by baptism leads on to the rejection of original sin, a doctrine which is already sapped and undermined in almost all the sects of Protestantism. And that doctrine is the founda-

tion which underlies the whole structure of Christianity.

And what has the Church done? She has proclaimed as a fact laid up in the deposit of her faith that one and only one, and that one the Mother of God, by a most singular miracle of grace and a prodigious act of redeeming power was exempted from the stain of original sin. And by that decree she has given the most striking proof and confirmation that could be given to her doctrine of the universality of original sin, and of that degeneration, injustice, and separation from God of which it is the cause.

Peter lives in Pius. And if he knows the Church, her aspirations and her wants, he also knows the world, its diseases and necessities, better than the world knows its own. And it is not by diminishing truth, but by increasing its light, that he meets the difficulties he has to encounter. Nor does he look to the moment only, but to God, and to all time to come, for his reply.

When the Church declares that Mary was without sin, she also declares that she would have been under sin if Christ had not saved her from it; and she emphatically proclaims that her case was most singular, and that all besides her are born beneath its dire infliction; that "all have sinned, even the child of one day upon the earth";* and that all stand in need of regeneration, and of a regeneration so unmistakable as to the time and mode and authority of its application, and so sure in its effects, that no one may be haunted with the terrors of doubt as to whether they have, or have not, received its benefits.

Mary, arising into the creation in unclouded

* Rom. v, 12, and Job xiv, 4 (Septuagint version).

purity, is the one bright star which makes more visible the darkness of the universal night of human conceptions. And the appearance of that blessed one, illuminating by her immaculate light the unclean gulf of original sin, is greeted with clamours and cries from the enfeebled sects of Protestantism. It is as if they had been struck by a terrible blow. Pride is offended that one so lowly should be so great, and that humility should be so supremely exalted. Nature, poor fallen thing, is indignant and disgusted in its self-sufficiency at such a revelation of grace, and the spectacle of its anger is as painful as it is instructive to contemplate. May God give to that erring humanity the light to see those sacred truths of which this beautiful mystery is the last expression.

Meanwhile German rationalism has charged Protestant Evangelicalism with its inconsistencies, as exhibited in these outcries against the definition. The "Protestant Ecclesiastical Gazette" of December 9, 1854,* remonstrates with it in the following terms: "Why all this clamour on the part of orthodox Protestants? This belief is but the necessary and very natural consequence of their own principles, and it is surprising that the definition did not take place sooner, and that orthodox Protestantism had not long since proclaimed it. . . . The roots of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary extend in fact into the very depth of the substance of their own dogmatic system, and show both the weak sides and the corruption of the Evangelical church. In substance it is a question on the historical fact of the holy and immaculate personality of Jesus Christ. . . . If they are not disposed to revise from top to bottom the

* From the "Univers" of January 26, 1855.

theory of original sin, and our orthodox now desire it less than ever, there is no other part to take but to imitate the Catholics, and to deny the influence of original sin on the human nature of Christ; this will also lead to the liberating of His Mother, that is to the asserting that she was conceived without original stain. This is what the Roman Church has done in our days, not arbitrarily, but pushed on by the force of a necessary consequence. Thus it is not possible to believe that Rome could refuse her sanction to the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. These things seem at this moment to have no direct influence on the Evangelical Church, but before long we shall see the theologians of orthodox Protestantism driven at last to the necessity of acknowledging what is contained in their own principles, of which the Roman Church has done nothing but recognize a consequence, and sooner or later it will bring the orthodox to venerate the Virgin."

But behind religionism is philosophism, upon which, as "truths are diminished from the children of men,* they in a sort of despair fall back; and faith in the phosphorescent lights of corrupted nature is held to be a better thing than faith in Christ. With the rationalists all men are born just, and with inherent powers for accomplishing their perfection. There is less of this misery with us than on the Continent, but it is the growing evil. With this class, as all are considered to be born in innocence, it is taken as an insult to human nature to proclaim, that one alone is created innocent. What is their grand philosophical cry? The perfectibility of man: the pagan's confidence in human

* Ps. xi, 2.

resources for human happiness. This is upsetting religion, law and policy, wherever it comes. Perfection is to be reached, and even equality of perfection, not through God's grace but by men's efforts—by combination of their energies; by working in the products of nature; by commerce in them; by new social arrangements to come out of the conflict of opinions or of weapons; by enlightenment, that is, by the rejection of traditional wisdom; by fitting religion to each man's natural tastes and so rejecting authority, priesthoods, sacraments and dogmas; by systems of secular education; by philanthropy and social benevolence under mechanical arrangements. And out of some of these, or all of them, there is to come a regeneration of society, and out of the regeneration of society there is to come a regeneration of the individual man. From what does all this arise but from faith in fallen human nature? from the belief that man contains within himself, or draws from the natures around him, the sources of his own perfectibility? Let us ask, perfectibility in what image? Surely not in the image of God.

But behind all this there is a deeper cause, a disease profoundly seated. It began in Protestantism, it ends in this rationalism. Opinion has pushed away truth. Those sinking heresies no more understand the nature of truth than they understand the nature of perfection. Truth is one and unchangeable. It is to-day as it was in the beginning. It resides in God, it is given to us. It changes at no man's will, it bends to no man's inclination. It can no more grow from the mind which beholds it than the landscape can grow from the eye which looks upon it. Man receives it from above, and although

by his words he may awaken the minds of others to behold it, he does not originate it from himself. It is not in the senses, it is not in the instincts, it is not in the imagination, it is in the light of God, and "in His light we see light." * It is a deposit. "And what is this deposit? It is confided to thee, it is not invented by thee; thou hast received it, thou hast not devised it; it comes not of genius but of teaching; it is not of private usurpation, but of public tradition; it is brought to thee, not produced by thee; thou art not its author but its keeper; not its guide but its follower; not its master but its servant." † It searches the conscience and claims the undivided homage of the heart. It consents to the humble, but repels the proud, for it demands an absolute obedience and submission to its dominion; yet when it has entered the soul it sets her free, and fructifies our reason with its light. It is the most positive of all things, and it must be believed before it can be fully received, for it is the reason of God and will not be proudly questioned but obeyed. Grace is a necessary condition, for it raises, quickens and illuminates the inward powers to see and hold the truth. But grace is not given beyond a certain measure, and that measure is not the same to all, unless we invoke it by devoted and generous prayer, by self-sacrifice and by denial of its enemy the flesh.

"The wicked man, when he comes into the depths of sins, despises." ‡ These are the words of truth. When he dwells in the depths of his corrupted nature, he despises truth. And, mysterious blindness! the more he sinks into the degradation of his nature, and the more he confides

* Ps. xxxv, 10. † S. Vincent. Lerin. Commonitorium, n. 27.
‡ Prov. xviii, 3.

in the poverty of his unassisted reason, so much the less does he see of that degradation and that nakedness. He cannot read the facts within his conscience, though written in fire. For pride is only made visible to its possessor in proportion as it begins to pass away, and humility is on the dawn.

Now Mary is the highest example of human perfection and of created happiness. And this great fact strikes down a thousand theories. In every earthly sense of the word she is weak, as she is lowly, poor and humble; and yet she is perfect as no one else ever was perfect. And her perfection is the work of a sublime grace, which puts her nature in order and sets her higher powers free in God. The Immaculate Conception is the mystery of God's strength in weakness, of His height in humility, of His glory in purity. And when we contemplate that glorious creature, in whom from the first instant of her creation the image of God was so beautiful, in whom grace found no resistance, whose aspirations grew ever more divine; when we contemplate that living shrine of the Holy Spirit's fire; when we look up to that animated temple of the Divinity, and behold her immaculate brightness, as clothed with the sun and crowned with the stars, and seated next her Son above Cherub and Seraph; and when we hear her truthful lips proclaim: "The Lord hath looked down upon the humility of His handmaid, . . . He hath lifted up the lowly"; * our pride sinks down rebuked, our false ambition stands reproved, our sensuous strength betrays the weakness of its origin, and our confidence in the perfection of our nature is discovered to be that broken reed

* Luke i, 48, 52.

of which we had so often heard in vain. The condition of perfection is shown to be chaste humility, and the source of perfection the grace of Christ. And that grace must come to us as Christ prescribes, and not as we choose.

How does her Immaculate Conception throw light into the words of scripture concerning Mary? When the archangel came to her on that embassy from God, he did not greet her by any human title, but he described her privilege. He did not say, "Hail Mary," or "Hail Virgin," or "Hail daughter of David"; but he said: "Hail, full of grace. The Lord is with thee."* And when Elizabeth saluted her arrival with inspired words, she did not say, "Blessed Mary," or "Blessed Cousin," but "Blessed art thou amongst women,"† that is, farther removed from the curse art thou than all women. And when Mary sang her canticle in the joy of her heart, she sang of all her graces. She sang of her divine maternity, but also of all her earlier blessings. For what hymn to the grace of the Immaculate Conception can equal this?

"My soul doth magnify the Lord. And my spirit hath rejoiced in God, my Saviour."‡ The Lord had magnified her soul, that her soul might thus magnify its Lord. God is pre-eminently *her* Saviour, for He has saved her from the first touch of the curse.

"Because he hath regarded the humility of his handmaid. For, behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed." God looked on her humility, because the measure of her humility was the measure of His grace. And blessed indeed shall she be called, because never under the curse.

* Luke i, 28. † Luke i, 42. ‡ Luke i, 46-55.

"For He that is mighty hath done great things to me; and holy is His name." Not one great thing, but *great things*. And He has done them *to me*, for to her alone they are done. And in what He has done for her He has demonstrated that He is both *holy* and *mighty*.

"And His mercy is from generation to generation to them that fear Him." The Mother of Mercy breathes the inspirations of that mercy. From her greater gifts she inspires hope in those who have had less experience of the grace and the goodness of God.

"He hath shewed might in His arm: He hath scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart." Let us remember that we are listening to her whom St John saw in the heavenly vision. She is THE WOMAN, bearing THE *man child* in her womb.* And in her prophetic inspiration she glances back to the conflict in heaven. She sees the arm of God put out against the proud. She sees Satan hurled down from his high place beneath her feet. She glances back to Paradise, and hears of the crushing of his head. She sees him lying in wait for her heel at her conception, and beholds him baffled of his prey. She sees him, "king over all the children of pride,"† reigning in the hearts of mighty ones who afflict the earth, oppose the truth, dishonour God; and she sees God turning the "deceits of their heart," their fondly cherished schemes to their destruction.

"He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and hath exalted the humble." And if He has exalted the humblest to the highest seat, Mary to a seat above the empty throne of Lucifer, so will He lift up each humble one in his degree.

* Apoc. xii, 5. † 1 Mach. ii, 47.

" He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich He hath sent empty away." The just hunger still for greater justice, and grace calls for grace. But they who are full of themselves and rich in their own conceits, are empty of God.

" He hath received Israel, His servant, being mindful of his mercy, as He spoke to Abraham, and to his seed for ever." He fulfilled His promise to Abraham, He received Israel, when He received thee and kept thee pure and dwelt in thee, O Immaculate Mother of God. He made the Gentiles Abraham's children, when He made Himself their brother and thee their mother, O powerful intercessor for thy children. He taught us to despise the flesh, resist the world and reject the devil, when He kept thee so pure from the corruption of the flesh, from the pride of the world and from the influence of the devil, that thou mightest have power with Him.

O Immaculate and most Blessed Virgin, Mother of the Lord of our salvation, pray to Him for us, thy children, who have recourse to thee.

APPENDIX

THE narrative of the vision of Helsinus is published by Gerberon in the Appendix to St Anselm's works,* as found in various MSS., in some of which the story passes under St Anselm's name as author, but without any good foundation for attributing it to him.

Gerberon† raises some historical objections to the narrative, on account of which he denies that any credit can be given to the tradition, viz., that there is no mention in any history of William the Conqueror having sent the Abbot Helsinus on a mission to the Danes; that if he had received any such information of their intended expedition, they would not have come upon him unprepared as he was; that Helsinus was not elected Abbot of Ramsey till 1080, and the alleged vision occurred ten years before; that one of the narratives represents Helsinus as a monk of St Augustine's till he was made Abbot of Ramsey, and at the time of the Conquest the Abbot of St Augustine's was Egelsinus. He is stated in Thorn's Chronicle to have joined Archbishop Stigand in raising the men of Kent and leading them against the Conqueror. By this proceeding they drew his resentment upon them, and in consequence Stigand was deprived of his archbishopric, and Egelsinus made his escape to the Danes and was never heard of again.

In reply to these objections it appears that Egelsinus, Abbot of St Augustine's, was appointed by King Edward to the care of Ramsey Abbey on account of the infirmity of the abbot.‡

* Pp. 505, 507.

† Gerberon, Censura Ep. vel. serm. de Concep. B.V. in Op. S. Anselmi.

‡ Hist. Abb. Rams. Gale's Scriptores, vol. i., p 461.

Thorn's story of the men of Kent is considered doubtful by Lingard,* yet Egelsinus certainly seems to have lost his abbey, and to have been succeeded by Scotland, a Norman, in the year 1068 or 1069. If his voyage to Denmark was a flight instead of a mission, he may have gained information that he turned to account with William. Lingard says the king had been made "acquainted with the menaces of the Danes, and had made preparations adequate to the danger."† Egelsinus may then have been allowed to retire to Ramsey till he was actually elected abbot of that monastery in 1080.

A further difficulty not noticed by Gerberon arises from the date alleged for the vision being 1070 and the invasion of the Danes having taken place the year before. But this date 1070 is only given in the margin, not in the body of the narrative. The reply of Peter Cellensis to Nicholas of St Albans, who seems to have urged the vision as authority for the festival, is amusing enough. The Bishop of Chartres says for answer "that English levity is not to be put into comparison with French maturity. That as the English are surrounded by water, they live in a dense atmosphere which subjects them to vapours and so disposes them to dreams, and they mistake their dreams for visions."‡

On the whole there appears nothing in the narrative that may not be reconciled with the facts of history, as far as they are known to us. And the corroborative testimonies mentioned in the text are strong presumptions in favour of the truth of the tradition.

* History of England—William the Conqueror. † Ibid.

‡ Op. Pet. Ab. Cell. et Ep. Carn. Epist., l. vi, ep. 23. See "Legend of Abbot Elsi," by the Rev. H. Thurston, "Month," July, 1904.

INDEX OF SUBJECTS

abp=archbishop ; bp=bishop ; d=died ; f=founded ; m=martyred

Abou, Ishac, 131
Abraham, a type of Christ, 26
Adam, born immaculate, 98, 108 ; his fall, 92
Adrian VI (pope 1522-3), 183
Albert the Great, 136
Alexander VII (pope 1655-1667), 56, 151, 185
Ambrose, St (bp of Milan, doctor, d. 397) 77, 116, 160
—— Ansbertus (O.S.B., d. 1439), 78
Amphilochius, St (bp of Iconium, d. 394), 22
Anastasius (monk of Mount Sinai, 7th century), 66
Andrew, St (apostle), 113
—— St (of Crete, d. 720), 102, 122
—— (abp of Cæsarea), 77
Angels had imperfect foreknowledge of the Incarnation, 64 ; how redeemed, 66 ; their trial, 66
Anselm, St (abp of Canterbury, doctor, d. 1109), 50, 124, 164-5
Aretas (bp of Cæsarea, 6th century), 78
Arians, 6
Augustine, St (bp of Hippo, doctor, d. 430), 11, 32, 41, 51, 66, 76, 81, 105, 118, 126, 167, 179

Bandello (O.P., d. 1506) 182
Baptism, its effects, 82
Brethren of Jesus, 103, 114
Breviary, 184
Baius, M. (prof. of holy scripture at Louvain, d. 1589), 184
Baronius (cardinal, wrote *Annales Eccles.*, d. 1607), 103
Basil, St (bp of Cæsarea, doctor, d. 379), 16, 22
Benedict, St (founded O.S.B., d. 543)
Bellarmin (S.J., cardinal, d. 1621), 186
Benedict XIV (pope, 1740-1758), 56, 186
Bernard, St (abbot of Clairvaux, doctor, d. 1153), 66, 79, 89, 135, 144
Bonaventure, St (O.F.S., bp, doctor, d. 1274), 136, 162
Bridget, St (f. Bridgettines, d. 1373)

Catharinus (O.P., bp, d. 1553), 176
Catherine, St (of Sienna, O.S.D., d. 1380) 147
Capponi, 102
Chappé, John (wrote poem on Im. Conc. 1486), 166
Clement VIII (pope, 1592-1605), 185
Catharine, St, Prayer of, 147
Cerinthians, 73
Collyridians, 7
Conception, twofold, 54 ; feast of in the east, 158 ; west, 161 ; England, 165 ; Rome, 182
Confraternities of the Immac. Conception, 166

Councils, their authority, 195; at Avignon (1432), 174; Basle (1431), 174; Ephesus (431), 6, 119; Frankfort (794), 173; London (1328), 164; Trent (1546), 85, 175; Vatican (1854), 189
Cyprian, St (bp of Carthage, m. 258), 66, 181
Cyril, St (patriarch of Jerusalem, doctor, d. 386), 114

David, a type of Christ, 27
Denys, St (the Areopagite, converted by St Paul, bp of Athens, m. 95), 89
De Sacy, 73
Development, Law of, 193
Dionysius, St (patriarch of Alexandria, d. 264), 113, 114
—— *see* Denys
Divines, Voice of, 135
Dominicans, 143-150
Dove of Noah, 109; of the Canticle, 110

Eadmer (Cluniac monk, secretary to St Anselm, d. 1124), 12
Earth immaculate before the fall, 94
Ebionite heresy, 3, 73
Episcopate, never contested the doctrine, 152; its authority, 179
Eutychians, 180
Eve immaculate before the fall, 92, 108
Exception from law, 34
Ephrem, St (deacon of Edessa, d. 379), 75, 116, 160
Epiphanius, St (bishop of Salamis, d. 403), 4, 7, 37, 66, 75, 98, 101-4, 114
Eusebius (bp of Verceil in Gaul, d. 370), 12

Faithful, Voice of the, 167
Fathers, Voice of the, 112
Fall of the angels, 64; of man, 91; reversed, 93
Felix of Urgel (heretical bp, d. 818), 121
Festival, *see* Conception
Fisher, Bl. John (cardinal bp of Rochester, m. 1535), 168
Fornari, Cardinal, 188
Fulgentius, St (bp of Carthage, d. 533), 51

Galland (professor of Arabic, d. 1715), 113
Gaude, Fr M. F. (Procurator-general of Dominicans), 150, note
Geoffrey de Gorham (abbot of St Albans, d. 1146), 165
George (bp of Nicomedia, 1621-3), 95, 102, 158
Germanus, St (patriarch of Constantinople, d. 733), 102, 122
Gnostics, 5
Gregory XV (pope 1621-3), 57, 151, 185
—— XVI (pope 1831-46), 186
—— St (of Nazianzum, bp, doctor, d. 389), 66, 127
Gradation in nature, 42; in grace, 44, 46
Guéranger (liturgist), 159

Hall, Joseph (Protestant bp of Norwich, d. 1656), 50
Helsinus (abbot of Ramsey), 161, 184, 215
Heresies, Modern, 203, 206
Hermes, 152
Hesychius (patriarch of Jerusalem, d. 609), 51, 75
Hilary, St (bp of Poitiers, d. 367), 127
Hippolytus, St (bp, m. 230), 102, 114

Ignatius, St (bp of Antioch, d. 107), 5, 65

Irenæus, St (bp of Gaul, m. 202), 4, 5, 66, 95, 97, 114
Innocent III (pope 1198-1216), 54
—— VIII (pope 1484-92), 183
Immaculate Conception, its meaning, 54, 160; the eternal counsel of God, 59; its moment, 107; the voice of the Fathers, 112; of Mahomet, 128; of Luther, 131; of the Divines, 135; of the Liturgy, 158; of the faithful, 163; of the Episcopate, 173; of the Holy See, 181; definition by the Vatican Council, 191; when first controverted, 135
Indulgences for the office and mass, 182
Isaac a type of Christ, 27

Jerome, St (translator of the Bible, d. 420), 66, 167
Joachim, 101, 103, 104
John, St, evangelist, the companion of Mary, 77; his apocalyptic vision, 71-74
—— the Baptist, his miraculous conception, 29
—— of St Thomas, 67
—— of Damascus (monk, d. 760), 32, 33, 72, 95, 102-4, 123
Joseph, a type of Christ, 27
Julian Firmicus, 114
—— (Pelagian bp, d. 450), 117
Justin, St (m. 167), 114

Kenrick, 172

Lactantius (orator and Christian apologist, d. 325), 66
A Lapide, Cornelius (S.J., professor of Scripture at Louvain and Rome), 71
Leonard, St, of Port Maurice, 202
Leo X (pope, 1513–1522), 183
Liturgies, 92–96, 104; of St James, 159; of Alexandria, 159
Litany of Loretto, 176
Luther, 131

Magnificat, The, 212
Mahomet (false prophet, d. 632), 128-131
Manicheans, 32, 118
Maracci (clerk regular of Lucca, d. 1700), 148
Marius Mercator (wrote against Nestorians and Pelagians, d. 451), 13
Mary, her office, 1; union with Jesus, 8; forms the features of Jesus, 10; guided and ruled His childhood, 10; her preparation by God, 30; head of created beings, 49; foretold in Old Testament, 61; represented in the Apocalypse, 71; the ark of the testament, 71; prophecies apply to her and to the Church, 79; her purity necessary, 86; how redeemed, 88; the second Eve, 94–100, 114; compared to paradise, 94, 99, 114, 122; to the tree of life, 96; her conception, 109; sung in the Canticle, 110; silence of Evangelists about her, 101; portents before her birth, 103; her pre-eminence, 197
Maximin (bp of Turin, 5th century), 118
Mazzola, 103
Medal, Miraculous, 170
Methodius, St (bp of Tyre, martyr 311), 11, 66, 77
Morinus (oratorian, convert from Calvinism, d. 1659)
Moses a type of Christ, 27
Muratori (of Milan, d. 1750), 152

Nestorians, 6, 22
Nicephorus (patriarch of Constantinople, d. 828), 102, 104
Nicholas (monk of St Albans), 136
—— III (pope 1277-1280), 182
Norbert, St (founded Canons Regular, 1120), 165

Offices of the Conception, 184
Old Testament prepares for the Incarnation, 25
Origen (of Alexandria, d. 254), 95, 114, 175

Pallavicini (S.J., cardinal, 17th century), 175
Papal constitutions, 182
Paradise, 91
Pelagius (heresiarch, c. 400), 117
Perfection, The source of, 211
Philosophism, 208
Pride, 211
Protestantism, 207
Purity, of God, 86; necessary in Mary, 86
Paschasius, Rudbert (O.S.B., d. 865), 123
Passaglia, 72
Paul V (pope 1605-1621), 57, 185
Paulinus, St (bp of Nola, d. 431), 168
Perrone (Cardinal, d. at Paris 1618), 56, 176
Petavius Denys, S.J. (d. at Clermont 1652), 62, 125, 167
Peter Cellensis (bp of Chartres), 136
Peter Chrysologus (abp of Ravenna, d. 458), 96, 119
Peter Damian (cardinal, d. 1073), 126
Pius IV (pope 1559-1566), 183
—— V (pope 1566-1572), 140, 183
—— IX (pope 1846-1878), 177, 186
Preparation, Gradual, 25
Primasius (bp of Adrumetum, c. 560), 78
Proclus, St (patriarch of Constantinople, d. 447), 13, 16, 120, 127
Prophets, The, typical of [Christ, 27
Prudentius, Aurelius (poet, 4th century), 121

Rationalist view of the dogma, 207
Ratisbonne, Alph. (convert from Judaism, 1842), 171
Redemption, to preserve from sin or to save after sin, 89
Religious Orders support the dogma, 141-143
Ricci (bp of Pistoia), 173
Rosmini, Antonio (founded Order of Charity, 1828), 153
Rupert (abbot, O.S.B., d. 1135), 68, 73, 79

Sabas, St (sup. general of monasteries in Palestine, d. 531), 119, 158
Sabina's, St, in Rome, 150
Satan, his fall, 66; overthrown, 70; type of antichrist, 70; conflict with Mary, 72; his pride, ambition, hatred of God incarnate, 75
Scotus, Duns (Scotch, O.S.F., d. 1308), 67
Scribonius, 67
Sin, Original, 81-86; its effect on the regenerate, 83-87
Sixtus IV (pope 1471-1484), 57, 140, 182
—— V (pope 1585-1590), 185
Spondanus, 174
Stuart, Moses, 72
Suarez, Francis, S.J. (d. at Lisbon, 1617), 67
Sufferings, 90
Teaching authority, where, [138

Temple, The, its preparation, 31
Tertullian (priest of Carthage cir. 200), 66, 95, 97, 114, 191
Thomas Aquinas, St (O.P., died 1274), 102, 136, 144
Theodore (patriarch of Jerusalem, eighth century), 121
Theodotus (bp. of Ancyra, fifth century), 22, 24, 95, 119
Three children in the furnace, The, typical, 38

Ulpian (a Roman lawyer, anti-Christian, died 226), 37
Universities, eighteen insist on the dogma, 141

Vincent, St (Monk of Lerins, died 430), 193, 210
Voice of the Fathers, 112; of non-Catholics, 128; of Divines, 135; of the Liturgy, 158; of the Faithful, 167; of the Bishops, 173; of the Holy See, 181.

Wace (Canon of Bayeux, c. 1100), 162
Wisdom in the Canticle applied to Mary, 62
Woman, The, in Apocalypse, 71
Woman's condition raised by Mary, 52

INDEX TO SCRIPTURAL REFERENCES

Genesis i, 108; ii, 4; iii, 51, 61, 75, 93, 96, 98, 192; v, 35; xiv, xvii, xviii, 27; xxi, 35, 36; xxii, 27, 36; xxviii, 32; xxx, 27.
Exodus ii, 27; iii, 35, 38; xxii, 14, 34.
Deuteronomy xviii, 27.
Josue iii, 35, 39; x, 35
Judges vi, 39; xiii, 28
1 Kings i, iii, 28; xvi, 27
3 Kings vi, 31
4 Kings ii, 35, 39
Paralipomenon xxix, 31
Esther ii, iii, 36; xv, xvi, 37
Psalms ii, 10, 50, 108; viii, 67; xi, 208; xvii, 201; xxx, 210; xxxvi, 23; xxxix, 66; xliv, 197; xlv, 23; l, 84; lxvi, 95, lxxiii, 74; lxxxvi, 23; ciii, 33; cix, 16; cxviii, 117; cxliii, 90
Proverbs viii, 62; xvii, 85; xxiv, 38; xxxi, 19
Canticle i, ii, iv, 111; vi, 50, 111, 145; viii, 94, 111
Isaias vi, 17, 28; vii, 61, 72; ix, 60; xiv, 70; xlv, 32; lv, 59; lxvi, 79
Jeremias i, 28, 61; xxxi, 61
Ezechiel xxviii, 70
Daniel iii, 35, 38
Joel ii, 33
Zacharias ii, 33
Malachias i, 14, 11
Matthew i, 79; xvi, 21; xix, 52
Luke i, 2, 10, 11, 19, 22, 28, 29, 39, 40, 99, 100, 115, 134, 193, 211, 212; ii, 2, 10, 20; vii, 90; xi, 10; xxi, 181
Acts v, ix, xix, 21
Romans v, 14; vii, 84; viii, 75, 86; ix, 85; x, 196
1 Corinthians i, 16; ii, 16, 23, 83; xii, 45, 49; xv, 45, 174
Galatians iv, 60, 67
Ephesians i, 61, 65, 160; iv, 66; v, 11, 160
Colossians i, 60, 65, 160; ii, 8
Hebrews i, 8, 64, 65, 68; vii, 20, 27, 31, 49, 86; ix, 114; x, 91; xi, 19, 160
James ii, 26; iii, 38
1 Peter i, 60, 64, 160; iii, 65
2 Peter ii, 174
Jude, v, 160
Apocalypse iii, 60; xii, 71-75, 78, 213; xiv, 160; xxii, 60; xxxiii, 63

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